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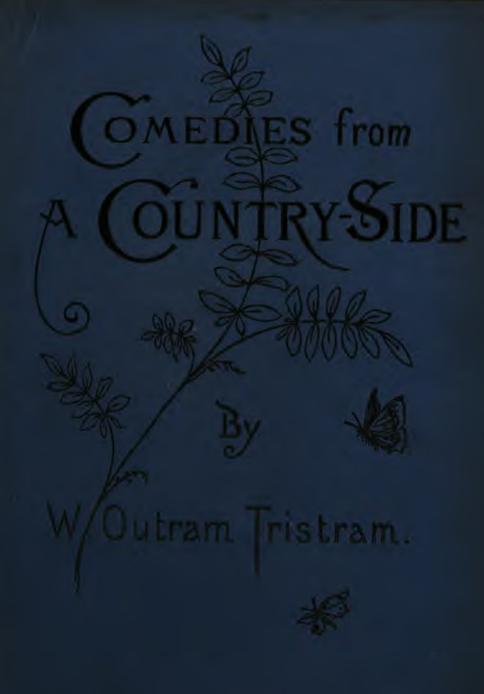
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	COUNTRY-SIDE	•
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COMEDIES FROM A COUNTRY-SIDE.

BY

W. OUTRAM TRISTRAM,

AUTHOR OF "JULIAN TREVOR."

"Why I deliver this horrible verse?
As the text of a sermon which now I preach;
Evil or good may be better or worse
In the human heart, but the mixture of each
Is a marvel and a curse."

BROWNING.

WARD AND DOWNEY, 12, YORK STREET, COVENT GARDEN, LONDON. 1885.

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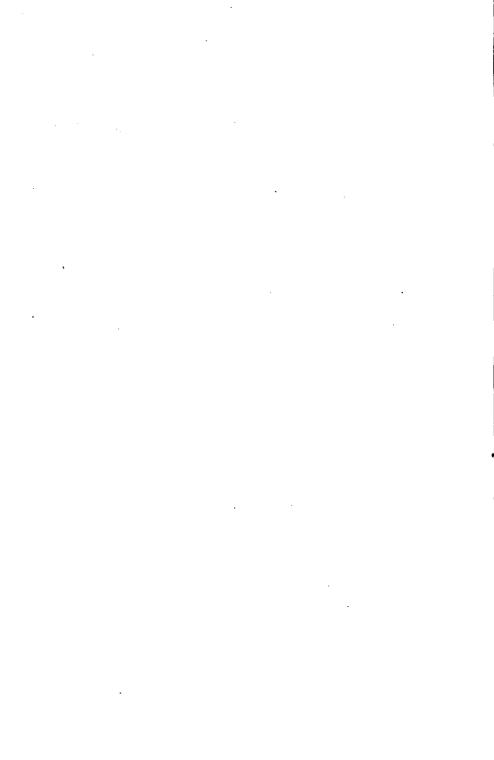
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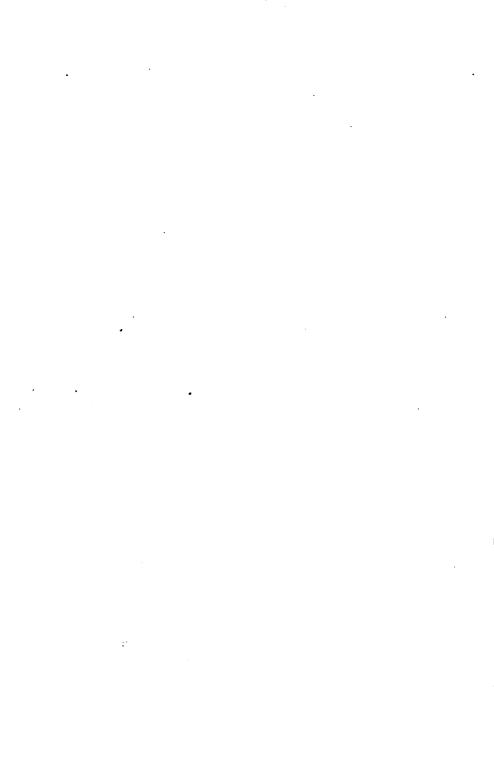
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COMEDIES FROM A COUNTRY-SIDE.

THE SQUIRE.



COMEDIES FROM A COUNTRY-SIDE.

THE SQUIRE.

IT was already six o'clock, and the surrounding woods and fields had begun to take the colours of sunset, when the triumphal arch, bearing the usual hieroglyphic motto of welcome that was to greet the eyes of Captain Siward Sinbert on his return from India with his regiment, was raised—amidst a buzz of admiration from twenty or thirty assembled yokels—over the lodge gate of the Grange Mashamde-la-Poele.

Mr. Ralph Sinbert, the Squire, and father of the expected hero — who, with his niece, Irene Wear, had from an early hour in the afternoon directed by word and deed the erection of this emblem of gratitude for an only son's return—now took one last comprehensive view of the situation, and found that everything was in order.

On one side of the carriage road the village band was drawn up in an array meant to be martial. Each member of it, well primed with beer and a consciousness that his skill was presently to be employed on ears not unworthy of it, grasped his instrument with a fervour that foreshadowed business, expanded his chest, and generally completed preparations for a sudden and spontaneous burst of barbaric welcome as soon as the dog-cart, with the scion of the house in it, should appear round the station turning. On the other side of the carriage-road stood a small company of estate labourers, headed by gamekeeper and bailiff, equally well primed with beer, and equally well prepared to give vent to a noisy and sudden welcome.

The Squire threw a glance worthy of Wellington on the eve of Waterloo over this army in position, and then turned to his niece. "Come, Irene," he said, "let us go up to the house. I wish to welcome my darling boy under the very porch where, five years ago, I said good-bye to him."

With these words he bestowed a parting look on the band, in which warning blended with encouragement; then, satisfied that they were neither too drunk to play nor too sober to be diffident, he gave his niece his arm and departed into the avenue with measured strides.

The preparations that he had made for his son's return were typical of Mr. Sinbert's mode of life. Sprung from a family that had been in the county since it had been a county at all, and, according to evidence, even before that, Ralph Sinbert (spelt originally Cyneberht) traced his lineage directly back to the Confessor, and, in an age of change, Radicalism, political economy, the union of classes, and other damnable heresies, his mind, untainted by these poisonous germs, still lingered with a calm content on "Thanes," and "Ceorls,"

the "Witenagemote," and the soul-stirring history of the great Saxon kings. Among a neighbourhood comprised (with the exception of the De la Poeles, who were Norman, and therefore, though secondary to himself, not to be reckoned with the scum) principally of young blood, he stood forth proudly, as painted by Millais in the Grange drawing-room, smiling the smile of a superior race, with eyes gazing back pensively through the cycle of centuries, and with hand on the Domesday Book.

In the library hung the family tree; indeed it formed the entire mural adornment to one side of the room, and reached directly from the present proprietor to Edward the Confessor. Collaterally it reached to Heaven knows where. Opposite to it hung the battle-axe which Wilfred Cyneberht had clanged on Norman helm at Hastings. In addition to this relic the hall was decorated with many suits of armour, which other departed Cyneberhts had worn at Ascalon, Crecy, Poictiers, and elsewhere, to the glory of God, the honour of their

country, and the repletion of their own moneychests.

Mr. Sinbert and his niece—who, since the death of her aunt some twelve years before, had acted as housekeeper at the Grange—walked slowly up a fine oak avenue, leading from the lodge to the old Tudor house, each under the influence of thoughts that they did not care to express.

Mr. Sinbert was a man of above sixty; and his figure, erect, almost military, carried these years well. Elsewhere, however, his age made itself painfully manifest: his face, yellow-skinned, was puckered into a myriad wrinkles, his eyes were deep buried under shaggy, overhanging brows, and his gums were garnished with a few fangs that might well have belonged to a wolf or to a centenarian.

Upon his niece the same seal of antiquity was set. It seemed that, like her uncle, she too had preternaturally grown old. She was only thirty; yet, notwithstanding a hat and style of dress ex-

tremely girlish, she would have been set down by an unbiassed judge as forty on the most moderate computation. She had once been pretty and petite, but her nose at any rate could no longer lay claim to this last distinction—it projected beyond all bounds. Her cheeks were sunken and sallow; and a mass of chestnut hair, which had once been her especial pride, now needed much dexterous management that its scarceness might pass unperceived.

Miss Irene Wear—to come suddenly to a sad truth—was the victim of a premature baldness, and always wore a cap in the house. Placed coquettishly on one side of her head, this cap passed for a feint at piquancy, under which its deeper meaning lay concealed. Miss Wear walked with sharp, vigorous steps, and had a habit of tapping the ground with her parasol as she walked.

Uncle and niece proceeded side by side up the avenue, and formed in themselves as complete a contrast as was possible to their surroundings. Everything, indeed, on the estate showed signs of

care and cultivation, except the proprietors. Here and there trees had been felled to open up vistas of woodland scenery, but not a stick more timber had been sacrificed than was necessary to secure a view; no fragment of moss or weed intrenched on the smooth surface of the carriage-drive, and the edges of the turf that lined it looked as if they had been clipped that very morning. All was well cared for, thriving, and in order.

From this background of rural prosperity the figures of Mr. Sinbert and his niece stood out in bold and sordid contrast. To a casual observer, the misery but half suppressed on their faces might not have been apparent, but any one who had studied the effect of disaster upon costume would have seen it in a single glance at their dress.

Mr. Sinbert and Miss Wear exhaled an atmosphere of poverty. It was not that their clothes were shabby, that Mr. Sinbert's boots bore marks of having been capped, and heeled, and sewn where they had been torn, and that Miss Wear's elbows

showed signs of coming through her sleeves; these manifestations in the quiet of the country would by themselves have meant nothing, or indeed in London. The richest men sometimes love rags, and in these cases the absolute test of poverty or wealth lies not in the clothes themselves, but in the way in which they are worn.

The man who walks in public unconcernedly seedy, with coat creased and threadbare, and trousers baggy at the knee, may be a philosopher, or a duke in disguise; but the man who wears rags as if they were purple and fine linen, and walks delicately in them, is a man who is poverty-stricken, but determined to keep up an appearance, whether he be a clerk in a City house with a narrow income and a huge family, or whether he be a man once of wealth and social position, who, though he has lost both, will die rather than surrender his pretensions to either.

Some three years before the opening of this story, Mr. Sinbert's fortunes had reached this latter

lamentable stage. He had succeeded while quite a young man to estates already encumbered. His predecessors had been Sinberts from the top to the toe in their calm confidence in their own superiority to their neighbours, and in a feudal feeling for display. Their conception of the duties of their position was simply that a certain style shaped to rule must be kept up, whether there was money in the bank or whether there was none. The consequences of this frank programme soon made themselves felt. Mr. Sinbert entered upon the pleasures of proprietorship an already embarrassed He had sense enough to see that relandlord. trenchment was necessary, but the Cyneberht blood ran too purely in his veins to permit an abatement of display. In matters of finance he showed himself a materialist. He had little feeling for the evidence of things not seen, and he preferred to see a large body of useless servants hanging about his house than to know that their absence was building up for him a compensatory equivalent in the form of a balance at the London and County Bank. Thus, though the last of the farms had long been let, Mr. Sinbert still retained the services of his own bailiff; only two horses and a pony were kept in the stables that had accommodation for forty, but a coachman, two grooms, and a stable-boy waited upon these; and though the supply of vegetables and fruit from the large gardens was tenfold greater than the demands of the household, the surplus was allowed to rot in the ground. It was impossible for a Sinbert to sell his garden produce. The servants' wages might be in arrear, but the pigs were fed on peaches.

The family solicitor was not slow to perceive the abysm into which the head of the house of Sinbert was being hurried by an insensate family pride. He drew one morning a vivid picture to Squire Ralph of the certain future in store for him if his present establishment was kept up.

"I think it my duty to speak plainly, Mr. Sinbert," he said, "and I tell you candidly that,

if you continue your present style of living, in two years you will be a ruined man."

No one likes to be told truths of this kind, however ready he may be to believe them. There are, as a rule, indeed, only two ways in which an obstinate man takes good advice. He ignores it altogether, or he flies into a passion. Mr. Sinbert adopted both these measures at once. He sent his old man of business to the deuce, and put his affairs into the hands of a young firm, noted for the dashing way in which they did business, and more ready with a loan, when it was wanted, than with prophecies that had not been asked for.

Within a year of his rupture with the family solicitor Mr. Sinbert's fortunes were desperate, and his crazed passion for state and ceremony took a more sombre hue when it began to prey upon the very vitals of his household. His annual income was now entirely swallowed up by his wages list, but still the Saxon's pride held out. Not a servant was dismissed, but Mr. Sinbert became a sudden

at the Grange no more. The servants, in point of fact, were told that they must either go or live on potatoes, and, as the majority of them had been in the family since they could first crawl, they betook themselves with a canine sentiment of fidelity, but with many imprecations, to a detestable diet. The climax of this phase of affairs was soon afterwards reached. Mr. Sinbert came back one day from London, and told his butler never to put any more wine upon the table, as he had been ordered by his doctor to drink nothing but water. The butler, who had been a boy with his master, removed the port without a word, and a general teetotalism supervened.

Mr. Sinbert's constitution was at once affected by this sudden abstinence from a habit which age and custom had rendered necessary for his health. In a week he fell away to such an extent that his best friends would hardly have recognised him. He became suddenly and horribly old; his cheeks became yellow and sunken, his eyes lost all light, his step all elasticity; he seemed more like a mummy than a man; yet still the ruling passion, which had now developed into a mania, fed a body—otherwise half starved—with the fire of a gratified family pride.

A strange misconception assisted Mr. Sinbert in carrying out his ghastly recipe for keeping up an establishment. Seeing the gross inconsistency which existed between the housekeeping and the size of the property, Irene Wear became confirmed in the belief that her uncle was a miser. She supposed that while he was literally starving his establishment, and living, as far as clothes and food went, like a pauper, he was in secret accumulating thousands.

This supposition was the death-blow to any hope of Mr. Sinbert's being weaned from his strange courses. Had Miss Wear divined the real condition of her uncle's fortunes, she would have soon prevailed upon him to curtail his expenses by

cutting down his establishment; now, however, that she had convinced herself that this establishment was but the cloak with which a miser concealed his unpopular eccentricity from the world, she threw the fatal weight of her influence into the opposite scale, willingly acquiesced in Mr. Sinbert's arrangements, and encouraged him equally in his abstinence and in his parade.

"For," thought she, "it is right that we should keep up appearances in the neighbourhood. The money now accumulating will be mine one day—when Siward and I are married. Uncle has been starving and screwing now for five years. If he only keeps on, I may be married directly Siward comes home. Vive la bagatelle!"

This preamble may be considered as a prologue. The drama itself was set in action by Mr. Sinbert's receiving a letter from his son, Captain Siward Sinbert, saying that his regiment had been ordered home, that he was on the point of sailing from Bombay as he wrote, and that he might be ex-

pected at the Grange Masham-de-la-Poele on about that day six weeks.

Uncle and niece received this news with concealed transports. Each of them looked upon it as a signal for action. They mutually expressed a Christian thankfulness that the son of the house was so soon to be restored to them, and secretly determined to make good use of him for their divided aims.

The thoughts which occupied Mr. Sinbert's brain, and the thoughts which occupied his niece's, showed to what a fearful extent the house of Sinbert was divided against itself.

Miss Wear felt that her uncle had been saving long enough, and that a little liberality would now become him; she felt also most poignantly that the time had come for Captain Siward Sinbert to fulfil the secret promise of marriage he had made her on the eve of his departure for India.

Mr. Sinbert, on the other hand, now fully alive to the fact that his affairs were desperate, felt that the time had come for his son to retrieve them. That his son should marry at once was also his intention, but he had no thoughts of Miss Wear as being an eligible person.

"Cynthia de la Poele," he said to himself, "will be a match worthy of the dear boy. In a year she will be her own mistress. The estates almost join. Yes, yes; dear Siward will free me from these cruel embarrassments, and before it is too late."

Thus convinced that his saviour was come, Mr. Sinbert had made up his mind that no expense should be spared in his reception. Policy, more than a spirit of thankfulness, dictated this resolve. As Captain Sinbert was to restore the house to its former footing, it was for no one's good that he should catch sight of the skeleton in the closet. For the first time, therefore, in four years a banquet had been prepared. The cellar doors had been opened, and the finest wines in it brought up; everything, in short, that could be done had been

done to blind the eyes of the returning hope of the house as to the real condition of its fortunes the mustering of the clans at the lodge gate; the good cattle that would bring him from the station; the very butler, footman, and page who would help him to alight at the hall door.

As Mr. Sinbert's mind dwelt on these well-laid plans for allaying filial suspicions, his eyes glistened.

"All will be passed over without his knowing anything about it," he said, referring to the unsuspecting Siward. As he spoke, in a sort of vision he saw his son the husband of Cynthia de la Poele; he saw the two splendid properties joined into one ducal whole; the mortgaged lands redeemed; the stables once more filled with horses; the tarnished lustre of the name of Sinbert once more resplendent in a world of upstarts.

He could contain himself no longer.

"Irene," he cried in a voice vibrating with a great triumph—"Irene," he cried, "we must find a wife for Siward, now that he is home again."

The blood rushed to Miss Wear's cheeks. Was her uncle already bent on forwarding the one object of her life? Was the prize at which she had aimed steadily for the last five years, and which she had determined should be hers in spite of any opposition, about to be yielded without a word? Her heart pulsed wildly at the idea. She was able, indeed, to put so little restraint upon herself that her uncle would probably have noticed her emotion, had not his ears been greeted at the moment with the strains of "See the conquering hero comes."

The moment that these sounds, telling of the appearance of the returning Captain's chariot-wheels round the station turning, reached Mr. Sinbert's ears, he was as lost to the presence of his niece as is the charger to his rider's weight when the bugle is sounded for battle. With a cry of delight he hastened to some rising ground on the croquet lawn which commanded the carriage drive. Here he stood with mouth agape and eyes stretched to

their utmost, like a starving warder on a watchtower, who has heard the first sounds of the army marching to his relief.

Miss Wear meanwhile retired to her bedroom and considered, in a state of intense suppressed excitement, as to how the faded prettiness of twelve years back might still be made to appear prettiness in the eyes of the man who had then sworm to be true to it for ever.

She had now, however, to learn the sad truth that much of life is a vague search for fancied wants, and a discovery that they are fancy. She had pined for the moment which was come; and now that she looked at herself in the glass, a sickening sense of misgiving told her that it had come too late. Was it the pink trimming in the straw hat that made her look so pale? She tried another one. How was it that under this hat her hair looked so colourless? This hat, too, was discarded instantly. Heavens! the next attempt made her look forty; and with each fresh disappoint-

ment she felt that she was growing older. How came it that she had never noticed the ravages of time before? Why did these lines under her eyes come upon her as a revelation which made her green with rage and anxiety? Miss Wear had never been a playgoer—she had hardly, indeed, been in London in her life—but she would for the moment have sold her soul for one of those arts by which (as a town cousin had told her) the ladies of the dramatic profession make themselves beautiful for ever.

As, however, she was completely destitute of any appliances for the production of eternal beauty, she soon left off sighing for a Madame Rachel, and racked her brain for a substitute, however feeble. Something must be done—that at least was plain—and quickly too. Suddenly she remembered the story told of an ancestor, a belle under the Regency. This lady had, amongst other preparations to setting out for the balls at Carlton House, been used to squeeze a little lemon-juice into her eyes. A

brilliancy, it was recorded, had been given to them by this treatment which was not to be withstood, and to it the First Gentleman in Europe had fallen an easy snare.

Miss Wear rang the bell, and ordered a lemon. The maid stared a good deal, but presently returned with one. The instant that she had left the room, Irene cut it in half and squirted a large quantity into eyes which in their natural state were as sensitive as eyes could be.

A moment after, the roll of wheels was heard from the drive below, and then her uncle's voice, calling upon her loudly to come down.

When, after the interval of a minute's intense agony, Miss Wear looked at herself in her glass again, she read her future as clearly as if she had been Voyante in the momentary reflection of a pale face, swollen and bloodshot eyes, and an angular figure utterly void of youth, and charm, and contour.

The first revulsion from despair is, however, hope; and Irene, when her uncle's voice again

made itself heard on the stair, calling to her to come down instantly, remembered suddenly that appearance was not all that men look for in a wife. She left the room, having positively conceived hope. Her beauty might have waned, but her wit at least had not worn itself threadbare.

She had no sooner closed her bedroom door than she heard her cousin's martial tread on the stair. The opportunity was a good one. The lamps were not yet lighted, and the armour of departed Cyneberhts hung round the walls generated a gloom most favourable for a meeting of lovers long parted. Miss Wear felt that Fate had for once been kind to her, and paused in the dark passage at the top of the staircase.

Suddenly she presented herself before the tall figure of the Captain.

"Siward!" she cried, holding out both hands to him. Her eyes swam, her voice was stifled, she was in a tremble from head to foot.

So indeed was the Captain, though from a

different cause. His was the emotion of a man who opens a door suddenly and falls an instant victim to a booby trap.

"Good Gad!" he exclaimed, starting back and laying hold of the banister. Presently he recovered himself. He then twirled a silky moustache, held out three fingers, drawled, "Well, Irene, how goes it?" and passed languidly to his dressing-room.

Miss Wear stared after her ten years' absent lover, hopeless, despairing; a cold damp stood out upon her forehead, and she was in much need of the assistance of the banister, as she staggered, rather than walked, downstairs. She found her uncle pacing up and down the drawing-room in a state of pent ecstasy.

"Have you seen the darling fellow?" he broke forth as she came into the room.

"Yes; I met him just now on the stairs."

"Ha! Is he not handsome? Is he not improved? Is he not a man any woman might be proud of? A genuine Sinbert! A genuine

Sinbert, if there ever was one! By the soul of Hengist!"

It was one of the Squire's peculiarities thus to throw himself into the spirit of the ages past by misquoting Ivanhoe.

Here the subject of this rhapsody entered the room. Captain Siward Sinbert was a tall handsome man, with a long blond moustache, and white enervated hands, like a consumptive woman's. He seemed palpably bored by his surroundings, and the victim of a preoccupation that was not to be shaken off. He too had his secret. In the moment, however—by those great forces of nature which move on in their might and their majesty, and which no preoccupation, however settled, can permanently impede or disturb—the Captain's thoughts were directed into another channel.

"I am deuced hungry," he said, looking at Irene in the moist pathetic way in which a bear in a menagerie looks at the bearer of a bun-bag. "I am deuced hungry. Hah!" he said again.

"There is the gong," said Miss Wear.

"Thank God!" said the Captain aside, presenting his elbow, and striding fiercely towards the food. The Squire followed, with eyes reeling in his head, and a gait which was in keeping. He was, as it were, drunk with joy. He was, indeed, something more than this. The sight of a returned darling who was to save the house, and the sight of a banquet to a gourmet who had starved for four years, was too combined a strain for a mind and body enfeebled by a detestable privation. Mr. Sinbert's brain began to turn. He took his seat at the head of the table with the look of a man who is under the influence of a mesmerist.

The Captain enjoyed a small fortune of his own, apart from an allowance extremely irregularly paid by his father. He had never felt, therefore, the want of a good dinner and a bottle of wine. He was, moreover, by disposition unobservant of his kind, except at cards. The famished glance which Mr. Sinbert, who had not dined properly for four

years, cast over a well-filled board, passed therefore without his son's notice.

When, however, Captain Sinbert had finished ladling his soup and arranging his napkin, he for the first time raised his eyes from his plate as he was in the act of drinking a glass of sherry. He put his glass down hastily; the pink forsook his cheeks. "By Jove!" he exclaimed, in a loud voice. Then he added, as an aside, "What's the matter with you, governor? Are you going to have a fit?"

Mr. Sinbert was sitting back in his chair, with his eyes fixed on a decanter of port which he had reached from the sideboard. He had waited till nobody was looking, with all an idiot's stealth, and had filled and drunk a tumbler of it. He still held the empty glass in his hand, and he was chuckling to himself, and waving his head from side to side in an ecstasy at a long-lost flavour. His son and niece were lost to him in his transport.

It was a picture of Bacchus grown senile.

"Good Gad!" exclaimed the Captain once more, in a louder tone. "All I can say is, Good Gad!" he repeated, forgetting the decencies in his astonishment at the sight.

The son's raised voice recalled the father to his senses. He raised himself in his chair, put the tumbler down hastily, and freed his features from a horrible smile.

"Well, Siward boy! well, Siward boy!" he said, "what is it?"

"Oh, nothing," said the Captain, taking off his sherry, with eyes thrown up in languid astonishment. "I thought for the moment you were not well, that's all."

Mr. Sinbert pointed to the decanter. "Who would not be well," he cried, "with such life as that inside him? Why, it would raise a man from the dead! Try it!" he went on, his excitement growing with each word. "Try it, I say," he said, pushing the decanter to his son. "It

is 1820. It is fit only for a Sinbert or a king to drink on his return from the wars. Genuine Saxon, by the soul of Hengist! Try it."

Captain Sinbert stared aghast at this exhibition of a father's bad taste. "By-and-by, by-and-by," he answered sternly. "I never touch port till after dinner."

"Try it now—I must beg that you do! Siward, I command you!"

Captain Sinbert was a man who could see a sneer across Salisbury Plain, as the saying is; he abhorred a scene; and he saw that behind the veil of a smug decorum, butler, footman, and page were watching his behaviour in an emergency with a breathless interest. When therefore, in spite of an eloquent and entreating dumb show, the father had filled him a glass of the nectar worthy of the Saxon kings, the son cast a wild and rueful glance around, and swallowed it.

It was vinegar.

For the first time in the evening, Captain

Sinbert concluded that his father was mad. In the face of this emergency he showed himself not unworthy of the name he bore. He slowly ejected the port worthy of Hengist into his soup-plate; then with the utmost deliberation he raised his eyeglass, examined his father with an attentive calm, and spoke these words:

"If you drink any more of that stuff you will have the colic." Then he turned to the butler: "Take that filth away," he said. "It may be worthy of a Saxon, but it is sour."

It was not till the wine had been removed from before his very eyes that Mr. Sinbert seemed to understand the drift of his son's speech. He now called to the butler in a voice half choked with passion to bring back the port; and when the man had left the room without taking any notice of his order, Mr. Sinbert turned fiercely upon his son, and for a moment looked as if he were going to take him by the throat. His eyes glared, and his hands clenched and unclenched themselves.

The Captain half rose from the table, prepared for the worst, when Miss Wear, who had sat till now stupefied at her uncle's behaviour, at last found strength to speak.

"Let us change the subject, if you please, uncle," she said.

The sound of his niece's voice acted magically upon Mr. Sinbert. He seemed to realise that he had been acting strangely. He mastered his passion with one of those strange efforts of which only madmen are capable, and turned to his son with a smile.

"India has destroyed your palate, my boy," he said.

Captain Siward looked as incredulous at this explanation as a South Sea Islander does on being told that the earth on which he is standing is a globular ball of matter whirling in space. After a moment's pause, however, he determined for the sake of peace and quiet to let the fable pass,

Mr. Sinbert received this silence as assent, and began to talk rationally on various subjects;

but he still excited the amazement of his son, though in another form. Captain Siward stared in mute astonishment at the ravenous appetite with which his father seized upon his food. Old Mr. Sinbert gorged himself like a famished wolf, till the veins stood out upon his forehead and the blood suffused his face.

The grim secret which prompted this excess being known to Miss Wear, she showed no surprise at it. For her own part, she was not sorry to dine; and, thankful that her uncle seemed once more restored to his right mind, she looked back upon his sudden symptoms of insanity as a terror fairly passed. Relieved thus from present anxiety about her uncle, she was able to consider what deep grounds her cousin had given her for mistrust. Her thoughts once more reverted, like Juno's, to her despised beauty; and while she was sustaining the conversation as well as she could, she was secretly convincing herself that she had an only too successful rival.

"I will discover Siward's mystery before the evening is over," she said.

Mr. Sinbert, meanwhile, having not so much eaten all that he would as all that he could, was considering how he might best break the matrimonial project he had in view to the son who was to take advantage of it; and the son himself, not entertaining the faintest suspicion of the deplorable secret of the house, was thinking with each sip of wine of the most delicate way of informing his father that he was about five thousand pounds poorer than nothing, and asking him to pay his debts.

As soon as Miss Wear had left the gentlemen to themselves, this conflict of interests commenced.

Feeling that the sooner the conversation was turned on money the better it would be for him, the Captain began to talk about a telegram he had seen in a late edition of an evening paper, hinting at the extremely precarious position of Turkish bondholders.

Mr. Sinbert at this news smiled the smile of the man who knows where his money is invested, and believes in the sweet simplicity of the Three per Cents. He was rather heavy after his dinner, and seemed to need stirring.

Captain Siward entered therefore upon the second parallel to his father's purse.

"I should be sorry to lose money myself," he said, "in an investment." He had backed horses for years, and with a persistent bad fortune.

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Sinbert—the thought of Cynthia de la Poele and her broad acres now working fully in his mind—"yes, yes," he went on nervously. "We should none of us like to lose money by investments, of course! To gain money! To gain money! That is what we want!"

The Captain gave to this dictum his most unconditional assent. His father upon this turned to him suddenly and said, "What do you think

of Cynthia de la Poele?" Captain Siward stared. He saw nothing but irrelevance in the interrogatory.

"She is a handsome girl," his father went on, the quick, nervous, fatal manner beginning to show itself again. "She is a handsome girl—a good girl, too, and a lady—and though not of such fine stock as 'ours'" (a glance at the portrait with the finger on the Domesday Book), "still of good family, a desirable girl. Do you not think so?"

The Captain, who, up to the present moment, had been completely at sea, here, stimulated by three or four glasses of claret, began to see land.

"Now I think I know," he began slowly, "who you must mean. You must be talking about that queer-looking dark-eyed gal who used to ride about on a shaggy pony before I went to Indhaw."

Mr. Sinbert's excitement culminated. He eyed his son deliriously.

"That queer-looking dark-eyed gal is a great heiress!" he whispered.

The son was once more startled by the father's manner, but he at the same moment thought he saw a side door opened to the father's purse. He saw a chance of allusion performing the part of appeal.

"Indeed!" he laughed rather nervously, for he felt that the moment had come. "Indeed!—aw—well, I wish the queer-looking dark-eyed gal who used to ride the shaggy pony would lend me five thousand pounds—I need it badly."

The words simply spoken were a slow match applied to a mine. Mr. Sinbert became the victim of a cruel fancy. He thought that his son had of his own accord solved the problem that was to save the house. He rose from his chair, clasped his son's hand, and burst into a flood of senile tears.

"She will do so—she will do so! My boy—my dear, dear boy!" he cried; "God bless you—God bless you!"

To this process Captain Siward had personally no objection, but his slow brain was at a loss to see what Cynthia de la 'Poele could have to do with it; and though he might at any other moment have reverenced a father's tears, under the present conditions they threatened to take all the starch out of his shirt front. He raised Mr. Sinbert gently but firmly therefore from his bosom, put him back in his chair, and asked him why in the name of everything mystic he should suppose that Cynthia de la Poele would lend him five thousand pounds.

The answer came to this query like a flash of lightning.

"She will marry you to-morrow! Will—nay, she shall!"

At the mention of the word marriage, a pallor so ghastly overspread the Captain's face, that he looked for an instant as if he was about to faint on the spot. He put down the glass he was raising to his lips, as if at his father's words some phantom had confronted him.

"Marry me!" he gasped, clawing at his high collar. "Marry me!"

Mr. Sinbert, who was sitting back in his chair in a paroxysm of delight at the fancied realisation of schemes long matured (the thought that a de la Poele could refuse a Sinbert not occurring to him for a moment), did not see the change which had shadowed his son's face. He, however, heard the astonishment and incredulity expressed in the voice, and a sudden suspicion seized him.

"Marry you!" he began, with a glare which made the Captain collect his energies. "Yes; and why not? Is there anything surprising in the word or thing? You are a handsome young fellow; Miss de la Poele is a woman. She is not of such descent as you are, but her origin is not a despicable one. She traces back in, I believe, an unbroken succession, not to the Confessor" (an upward glance), "but at least to Malvoisin de la Poele, who held the Conqueror's stirrup when he mounted on the morning of Hastings. What

grounds can Miss de la Poele have against the match?"

Captain Siward now felt it necessary to come to the point.

"I owe five thousand pounds," he explained.

At any other moment in his life these words would have sounded the knell in Mr. Sinbert's ears to all hope; but now he had conceived a faith in Cynthia de la Poele which could have moved mountains. He treated the Captain's naïve confession as lightly as a tale that is told.

"Cynthia de la Poele has twenty thousand a year," he said simply.

"Don't you think, sir," said the Captain, a little ruffled, and dragging his cuffs over his finger nails, "that we had better leave Cynthia de la Poele alone for a little, and consider how I am to pay my debts?"

"Cynthia de la Poele has twenty thousand a year," said Mr. Sinbert, in a kind of low moan.

He said these words over and over again

mechanically, as if they had become the solitary expression of his life. By-and-by, however, he perceived that his son was not taking the faintest notice of what he was saying, but was twirling his moustache and glaring at the ceiling tragically.

The Squire took this victim to boredom suddenly, almost fiercely, by the arm.

"Cynthia de la Poele is our only hope," he hissed.

Such was the intensity with which these words were spoken, that even Captain Siward's torpid nature took the alarm. A ghastly suspicion assailed him.

"What is the matter, father?" he asked, in tones suddenly grown filial.

At this moment Miss Wear's voice sounded through the room.

"When, pray, are you gentlemen coming into the drawing-room?" she said. "The coffee is getting quite cold." A move was made at once. No catastrophe, except an earthquake, will alter social forms.

Arrived in the drawing-room, Captain Siward, who had a nice tenor voice, proposed to sing. He thought that a little music might allay the ominous recollection of his father's last words. He guided Irene Wear to the piano.

"What do you say to trying a duet?" he said.

Miss Wear's heart leaped against her side. She thought she detected a tenderness in the Captain's tones.

"Let us sing something soothing," she whispered, with a liquid glance. "Uncle," she added, by way of explanation, "always has a nap after dinner, and it will send him off."

These words, though spoken in the lowest of whispers, reached the Squire's ears — abnormally quickened as all his faculties were by the nerve excitement to which he had for days been a victim. He thought that he was being made a

dupe. He felt certain that his son's reluctance to even think of Cynthia de la Poele as a wife was the result of a secret love for Irene.

The descent from heaven to hell can be made in an instant. A senile cunning usurped in Mr. Sinbert's nature a candour once open as the day. The old man covered his face with his newspaper as was his custom, and before the Captain had finished his first song Miss Wear stopped playing. She had satisfied herself that her uncle was asleep.

"See," she said, in tender tones, meant as an alarum to love. She pointed as she spoke to the newspaper which covered her uncle's face. It was rising and falling slowly as if with the measured breathings of a sleeping man.

The prospect did not seem to cheer Captain Siward much. "Are you sure that he is asleep?" he said. He did not suppose that his father was capable of design, but he was certain that his cousin was bent on an explanation.

"Cannot you see that he is?" answered Miss Wear. "And now," she added, "we will have a quiet little talk together here, in this window."

The window opened down to the ground, and the August moon streamed through it into the drawing-room. The Captain brought up two chairs as if they had been blocks on which his head was to be struck off. He knew what was coming now. The man had a horror of a scene, and he had gauged his cousin's nature well enough to know that a scene under her stage management would be something more than a storm in a tea-cup.

"There is only one consolation," he thought to himself, "she will soon wake the governor!" "Well?" he added with a sickly smile, as he came and sat down by her in the moonlight. He wished himself in the smoking-room with a brandy and soda.

Miss Wear gave one glance at her uncle to assure herself that he was still sleeping. Then

she drew an engagement ring from her pocket and held it up before the Captain's irresolute eyes.

"Do you recognise it?" she asked huskily.

"Oh, I say. Bother! You know," began the Captain. "I say, Irene, let us be reasonable, you know," he added.

"We will be," said Miss Wear, with decision.
"So perhaps you will tell me why your feelings towards me have changed?"

"Changed!" cried the Captain, deprecatingly, waving a white hand. "Changed? Pooh! Non-sense! Stuff!"

But Miss Wear was not to be easily put from her purpose. "Don't try and deceive me," she said. "Save yourself the trouble. I know all!"

The Captain for a moment paled, and his cousin noticed the change in his complexion. In a moment, however, he seemed relieved. He heaved a sigh of conviction, and said, half aloud, "Pooh! she can know nothing."

"You are deceived in that, let me tell you," said Miss Wear, who had overheard the last words. There was a decision in the girl's tones. The trembling Captain felt convinced that by some means unprecedented but certain, his cousin had sounded the depth of his mystery. Nothing could now, in his opinion, be more critical than his condition. He saw only one course open to him. Suddenly he fell upon one knee, and grasped Miss Wear's hands.

"Irene," he whispered, "forgive me! You cannot know all. I was driven to it. I never meant to do it. I have always loved you."

As he said the last words, he passed his arm round her waist.

The motive which prompted Captain Siward to this step was a complete misconception. He thought that his cousin knew the one secret which it was essential should be kept from his father's ears, in view of the five thousand pounds which he proposed presently to borrow from him; whereas all that Miss Wear really knew was, that there was a talk of a marriage between the man who had engaged himself to her and Cynthia de la Poele—a fact which she had learnt by listening at the dining-room door.

But though the motive which prompted Captain Sinbert to his romantic confession was thus mistaken, it proved as successful in momentarily soothing Miss Wear as if it had been inspired by a truth.

The girl breathed in the Captain's faded vows with all the credulity inspired by a hopeless passion. She was utterly passive in his arms, and for some moments could not say a word in acknowledgment of the passionate expressions of immutable affection which the Captain, with a practised facility, lavished upon her.

At last she said: "I was afraid, Siward, oh, I was so afraid that the reports which had reached me were true."

"Haw!" said the Captain, "you should never believe reports; they are always inventions." "And you still love me, Siward? Oh, I am so happy."

"Of course I love you," said the Captain," so make yourself perfectly easy in your mind."

At this moment Irene Wear, who was looking over her cousin's shoulder, uttered a scream, which made his blood run cold. He freed her from his embrace in an instant, and turned suddenly, expecting to be confronted by a housebreaker. For a moment, however, he saw nothing.

"My dear good child," he said, "what on earth is the matter with you?"

"Look in the mirror," gasped Miss Wear, who seemed palsied.

On each side of the fire-place two large mirrors reached from the ceiling to the floor. In one of these Captain Siward saw nothing to excite alarm. When, however, he turned his glance to the other—which was exactly opposite to the arm-chair in which Mr. Sinbert still reposed sleeping—he saw the reflection of a face which had nothing human

in it. Mr. Sinbert had thrown aside the newspaper, and, while he still feigned the measured breathing of an after-dinner sleeper, was watching with a maniacal glare the reflection which the fine mirror gave of an Idyl. Directly he met his son's eye, he sprang to his feet and faced him.

"So, sir," he cried, "this is the reason of your modesty, of your disinclination to marry, of your fears that Cynthia de la Poele will not condescend—of your—of your— Great God! how have I been deceived——"And he made a swift step as if to seize Irene. Captain Siward stood between father and cousin, on whose head Mr. Sinbert's fury was now transferred. "As for you, Irene Wear," he cried, "outcast, pauper——"

"Sir," interrupted the Captain, horrified, "this is perfectly monstrous. I will do anything you wish in reason; but I will not stand by and see even my father forget himself so vilely in the presence of a lady."

"You marry Cynthia de la Poele, sir," roared

Mr. Sinbert, "or you shall leave my house to-morrow and for ever."

"I am sorry that I am unable to gratify your modest request," replied Siward, losing all command over himself, "but Miss Wear will tell you why it is impossible."

"He is engaged to be married to me," cried Irene.

"I think," said Captain Sinbert, staring at her with a well-bred surprise, "that there is another fatal obstacle to my fulfilling my father's wishes, which you were the first to remind me of a moment ago, but which you now seem to have forgotten."

It was now Miss Wear's turn to stare. "I know of none," she said.

This answer incensed Captain Sinbert beyond all bounds. He felt that he was being played upon by both parties; that he had only escaped his father's net to fall into the snare spread for him by his cousin.

He fixed his eyes vindictively upon Miss Wear. "Surely," he said, "you have forgotten the secret that you were so ready to twit me with just now. The wife——"

He stopped, seeing the fatal mistake into which he had been betrayed. "The wife—that is, the wife—you have promised me," he said. But he had committed himself too deeply. The fatal word had fallen upon the Squire and his niece like a thunderbolt. They stood aghast, motionless, turned to stone. A second Perseus had shown them the head of a Medusa. At last Mr. Sinbert tremblingly passed his claw-like hand over his brow. He seemed to realise by this action that all "Married!" he said with an idiot's smile. Then, in a magnificent gesture—a poem of rage and despair in itself—he tried to strike his son, and fell forward on the hearthrug in convulsions.

The doctor was sent for, the stricken man carried upstairs and put to bed. Captain Siward

Sinbert paced the smoking-room all night, cursing his own indiscretion and the unfettered passions of turbulent old men. Bulletins were brought to him every now and then from the sick room.

For several hours grave doubts were entertained as to whether Mr. Sinbert would rally; but a giant constitution at length triumphed over the effects of a life which had for four years been one long privation. It seemed indeed at first that Mr. Sinbert's attack had been a scourge sent to chasten worse evils, for morning found him weak indeed and prostrated, but with his mind entirely clear. Every one conceived hope.

"You have not killed your father this time," said Miss Wear, meeting the Captain on the corridor, as he was on his way to the breakfast table.

She had previously refused his proffered hand.

"I am deucedly thankful for it," said the Captain.

But the Furies of the house of Sinbert were

still unappeased. Their last blow was yet to be struck. With all the arrogance of the doomed, Mr. Sinbert insisted on having his letters sent up to his bed-room. On an attempt being made to show the risk of such a step, he flew into such a rage that it was thought best to let him have his own way. This last exhibition of obstinacy, as it were, severed the thread by which the sword hung.

Mr. Sinbert read the doom of the last descendants of the Confessor in a letter which informed him that the remnant of a fortune which he believed invested in the Three per Cents. had, for the last four years, been invested by an intelligent solicitor in the Turkish Bonds, which had suspended payment on the previous evening.

The last scene of the comedy was now to be played. The Squire rang his bell, and requested that his son and niece would step up and see him. He was calm; his outward faculties seemed to be perfectly under his control; nor did he seem

to have suffered appreciably by this last blow of all which had fallen on an old age not devoid of sorrows. But in reality the news of his ruin, though it had left him able to reason, and eager to act on reason's impulse, had wiped away all recollection of the tragic incidents of the previous night.

Mr. Sinbert still believed in Cynthia de la Poele's twenty thousand a year. He still looked on his son's marriage with her as a certain means of salvation; and when Captain Sinbert and Irene Wear came into his room, he received them with the air of a financier who sees a certain way of bridging over a crisis by the execution of a carefully premeditated coup. He received them indeed with a smile at once pathetic and encouraging, and motioned them to chairs.

"Siward, my boy," he began faintly, pointing with wan fingers to the fatal letter, "I have had bad news in this letter—bad news. My fortune has been dissipated by a bogus investment. I

have fallen a victim to the machinations of miscreants. I have not a penny left in the world."

The grip which Miss Wear laid upon the brass knob of her uncle's bedstead at these words was like a vice. It was the dumb expression of a cruel ambition that had met its death-blow; the fading of a long cherished dream of wealth toiled for and starved for in vain. So violent was the girl's despair that it seemed as if the very brass would crumble beneath her hand.

"Have you—lost—everything?" she asked hoarsely.

"Everything—everything—everything!" answered her uncle, smiling as a man does who exaggerates an evil to contrast it with the good news held in reserve.

Miss Wear said nothing, but she let go of the knob of the bedstead with the gesture of a suicide letting go of a bridge railing. She sank into a chair.

The Captain had not hitherto spoken, but he

had eyed his father with the sympathetic yet hardened eyes, which we may all look for in the faces of our nearest relations on the first occasion on which money losses confront natural affection. He now added his quota of consolation to a ruined father.

"I have five thousand pounds' worth of debts," he whispered. Mr. Sinbert received this dire information with a smile. His time of triumph was come. By the utterance of a suggestion long kept secret he was about to convert this scene of desolation into a tableau of plenty. A gleam of triumph lightened on his face.

"There is only one thing to be done," he began with an assumed gravity; "but that will save us as certainly as I am lying here."

Conviction breathed in his face and tones. Son and niece conceived hope. Miss Wear sprang to her feet.

"What is to be done?" she cried. "What is to be done?"

Mr. Sinbert took his son's hand and drew him towards him. He fixed a look of indescribable cunning upon him, and said with a kind of chuckle:

"Cynthia de la Poele has twenty thousand a year."

The look that accompanied this speech, no less than the tone in which it was spoken, chilled Miss Wear to the bone. They had, however, a different effect upon the Captain, whose temper had been sorely enough tried as it was during the last twelve hours.

"What has Cynthia de la Poele to do with the matter?" he asked sternly.

"Marry her, my dear boy," said his father, rising in his bed. "Marry her! She is handsome; she is worthy of you. She is not of such descent as you are," he went on, delirium appearing frightfully in face and speech; "but her origin is not a despicable one. She dates back in unbroken succession, not to the Confessor, but at least to

Malvoisin de la Poele, who held the Conqueror's stirrup when he mounted on the morning of Hastings."

The repetition of the very words she had heard behind the dining-room door on the fatal preceding evening conquered Miss Wear's self-possession. It recalled such a flood of painful memories that she fainted.

Her uncle did not notice her state; his eyeswere fixed on his son. He seemed not to misunderstand the Captain's hesitation. He mistook his growing indignation for lack of confidence.

"Come, Siward, my boy," he said, "don't be cast down; all can be mended! Cynthia de la Poele has twenty thousand a year! She will be proud to be your wife."

But Captain Sinbert was tired to death of this kind of nonsense. He thought his father was jesting at misfortunes caused by his own credulity.

"Come, sir," he said, assuming a court-martial

air, "let us have no more of this! You forget, it seems, that I am married already."

The son's naive confession of his secret gave the death-blow to the father's reason. Mr. Sinbert looked at his son fixedly for a few seconds, and then burst into horrible maniacal laughter.

In this state he was found two hours after, when the medical man, hastily summoned from Masham, arrived, and he continued to pass from one paroxysm to the other during the remainder of the day.

Captain Siward, after seeing that his father was in good hands, returned to London and to the expectant widow who had captured him three months previously in Bengal. She now had to learn the stern truth that everything is vanity; but possessing little of the philosophic temper, she did not receive her husband's sad news with the utmost resignation in the world. Instead, indeed, of turning into the ministering angel when she saw pain and anguish rending her husband's brow,

Mrs. Captain Siward broke into loud and piteous exclaims on her ruined prospects, and propounded a series of conundrums to her liege lord, which he was at the moment completely unable to answer.

"Well, now, what will you do?" she asked.

"Now, how much have you got in the bank?

How are we to pay for these rooms? How am I

to ride in the Row of a morning?" etc., etc., etc.

The Captain was, however, when brought face to face with emergency, a philosopher in scarlet; and after profound reflection over a succulent dinner at the private hotel where he and his wife were at the time staying, he thus clothed his thoughts in speech:

"It is hard luck on a man, by George it is! to have had to put up with a governor who has given me such a confounded name! To have listened patiently, by Jove! and by the hour together, to all his confounded nonsense about the Domesday Book, and Thanes, and Ceorls, and the Witenagemote, and God knows what beside; and

then to find that the old buffer isn't worth a fiver! Well, well!" (Here the philosopher in him rose superior to fate.) "Is there another bottle of the Boy in that cellaret? Thank you, dear. We will see what we can do at Goodwood to-morrow."

Meanwhile the property that had been in the family of Sinbert since the time of the Confessor passed into the hands of an Australian sheep-farmer, who confessed to no family at all; and the old Squire himself, having been duly certified to be nothing but a harmless idiot, was allowed possession of a small cottage on the hill overlooking the Grange park.

Miss Wear, whose hair turned gray soon after the final revelation of ruin, still stays by the old man, less from a feeling of liking than one of convenience—a stronger bond of charitable union than Society perhaps suspects.

Her uncle, indeed, Miss Wear considers less as an object of compassion than as an incarnate

monument of the fate of confiding folly; nor, as she looks at him, and remembers how he has ruined her prospects, does this judgment of the heavens touch her with pity. She is, however, most attentive to the victim's wants. In one trait she is obstinately peculiar—she will receive no visitors; though many who had never called at the Grange in the days of prosperity come not unfrequently now to the cottage, to glance sympathetically upon the pride that has had a fall.

Mr. Sinbert employs the greater part of his time in sitting for whole hours before the picture of himself leaning on the Domesday Book—which an anonymous generosity purchased for him at the sale—or in basking when it is sunny in the small garden, and casting a grave and unspeculative glance over fields and waving woods, once his own, but which he looks at now without a sentiment and without a sigh. He eats heartily, and has never been in better bodily health in his life; but he will hardly ever speak except when the

weather is particularly gloomy. Then he will go about the house restlessly from morning to night, repeating with an almost tragic earnestness of conviction, "Cynthia de la Poele has twenty thousand a year."

As a general rule he gives his niece but little trouble. On one occasion lately, however, he evinced a disposition to roam, which has led to his being more strictly watched than he used to be. Miss Wear and the gardener being engaged in inspecting a new cucumber shed, the Squire stole away from the cottage without their noticing his departure, and acting upon some transient gleam of reason across the waste of idiotcy, made his way down the hill into the Grange park, and found himself once more among his ancestral oaks.

It happened that on this very day the new proprietor, a Mr. James Higginbottom, and a party of friends were expected to take possession. As Mr. Sinbert approached the house, the sound

of approaching carriage-wheels fell upon his ears. He listened for a minute, with the look of a man who suddenly hears the voice of a friend long vanished; then he staggered to the very same mound on the croquet-lawn from which he had, three months before, hailed the advent of his son, and waved a wild welcome to the new proprietor as he drove up with a pair of spanking horses to the hall door.

The party, attracted by his strange appearance, presently strolled out to where he was standing. Mr. James Higginbottom, smoking a long cigar, approached the old Squire with measured strides, and called to him in a voice of authority:

"Hi, there you! Old codger! Who are ye?"

The words were hardly out of his mouth' when Mr. Sinbert rushed upon him, and before he had time to avoid the onset clasped him closely in his arms, calling out in terrible accents, "My boy—my long-lost boy!"

At this instant, Miss Wear, attended by the gardener, made a hurried entrance upon the scene.

"For shame, uncle!" she said, trying to unclasp. Mr. Sinbert's arms. As, however, notwithstanding her commands, her uncle continued to hang about Mr. Higginbottom's neck, she motioned to the men who were standing by to pluck him off by force. Released from so unexpected an embrace, Mr. Higginbottom approached the late owner of the property, and asked what the devil he meant by his conduct.

Mr. Sinbert took him gently by the hand, and led him on one side. He motioned secrecy, looked at him with a low cunning, and whispered in his ear:

"Cynthia de la Poele has twenty thousand a year."

"Come, uncle, come," said Miss Wear, seizing him roughly by the hand. "Come with me, and don't make a fool of yourself."

The old man now proved obedient, and his niece led him passively away.

Mr. Higginbottom mopped his brow, and gazed inquiringly after the retiring figures. Suddenly an idea seemed to strike him. He turned to his friends with a chuckle:

"Of course," he said. "The estate idiot."

The two friends laughed assent, and said that the whole thing had been as good as a play. It was indeed the epilogue to a comedy whose first act had been played three months before.

THE PARVENU.

THE PARVENU

WHEN the fortunes of Mr. Ralph Sinbert, of the Grange, Masham-de-la-Poele had reached their lowest ebb, that historic property was sold by auction, and the departed Cyneberhts, who had frowned from the walls of the dining-room and library for centuries on their lineal descendants, now frowned upon a Mr. James Higginbottom, a retired Australian sheep-farmer, who had included them in his purchase.

For a fortnight or two after his entrance upon the estate, the new proprietor savoured all the delights of a new experience. He had come from New South Wales but six months before, and now he found himself settled on an English country-side; he had been a sheep-farmer, he was

now a justice of the peace; he had lived the last twenty years of his life in a log house, built partly by his own hands, and he was now lodged in a turreted manor house whose foundations had been laid by the Lord knows who. While the novelty of the thing lasted these considerations imbued him with a balminess of disposition that made his wife and daughter stare. The manners and customs of the colonist seemed to have been dissipated by this sudden contact with the past; he cursed but seldom, and caroused hardly at all. It seemed almost as if something of the refinement of the late proprietors had descended upon the man who had stepped into their shoes, and Mrs. and Miss Higginbottom hailed the seeming change, and foresaw peace.

On this occasion, however, though circumstances had made neither of them over-sanguine of events, both mother and daughter had foreseen too far. A month was sufficient to exhaust Mr. Higginbottom's interest in the Middle Ages.

He found the hall gloomy; the dining-room was without light in his eyes; the suits of armour that hung here and there made him shiver; the tapestries were simply an encouragement to the rats; and, in short, he wished the Tudor manor house at the deuce, and meditated a modern mansion.

This dark design was fostered in his breast by one of his many old colonial friends, whom he had invited from London during the first weeks of his entrance upon the property. The friend in question was a wealthy pork-butcher who had recently built a palace at Balham on the model of a Swiss châlet, and as a consequence thought any other style of domestic architecture nothing but an indecent anachronism. This great man, on the evening of his arrival at the Grange, had declared privately to Mr. Higginbottom that the sight of an oak panelling destroyed all appetite, and that the waving of tapestries made him crave for drink.

"As for the armour," he said, pointing to a

suit which Hugh de Cyneberht had worn at the Battle of Barnet, "it gives me a cold shudder down my spine, it does. Sell it to Sangers, my boy; sell it to Sangers. It will come in handy for the next Lord Mayor's Show."

These words took root in a soil only too well prepared to receive them, and soon after his friend had returned to London, Mr. Higginbottom determined privately on a restoration; but, as he felt that this move would be met by opposition if he mentioned it to his household, he made no mention of it at all, but simply sent for an architect. One of the partners of a well-known London firm, who had long wished to see the celebrated home of the Cyneberhts, answered the summons, and immediately on his arrival at the Grange was led out on to the croquet lawn by the proprietor.

Arrived at a spot whence a fine view was to be obtained of the old manor house, Mr. Higginbottom lighted a long cigar, and waved a deprecatory hand at the picturesque cluster of gray turrets and chimneys that lay before them in all the charm of the Middle Ages.

"This is a terrible affair," he groaned.

The architect, who loved a building of the class he saw before him better than he loved his wife, did not know very well what to make of this, so he supposed that there had been a fire, and hoped that no serious damage had been done. At this Mr. Higginbottom stared a little; but he was not long in making his meaning clear.

"We must pull it down altogether," he said.
"It's an eye-sore, that's what it is! It's a dreary,
damp, d——d mouldy old vault! Now do you
take my meaning?"

The artist thus addressed so far took Mr. Higginbottom's meaning as to tell him flat to his face that what he proposed doing was a sacrilege; and when Mr. Higginbottom begged him not to talk any of his d——d nonsense and remember that he was not an "assthete," he went further, and left for London by the next train, protesting against

the vandalism contemplated, and declining to have any share in carrying it out.

This slight experience having completely cured Mr. Higginbottom of fashionable architects, he engaged the services of a plain, honest man who had just set up for himself, and who, having twelve children, would have razed any national monument to the ground without fear or favour in the prospect of getting some work.

The new employé soon put things in motion, and a few days after the first interview scaffolding was erected against the dining-room window. When Mrs. Higginbottom saw these preparations on coming down to breakfast, she felt faint. She was a woman of seven-and-thirty, blonde, and inclined to embonpoint. She had in early days been extremely pretty, and when her husband was behaving at all decently, and things were going well, was pretty still. Tears were, however, her almost daily portion;—for Mr. Higginbottom had long ceased to look upon his wife

in any other light than as a housekeeper, and in this capacity she did not shine,—and much crying, resulting from this failing, had dimmed the lustre of a pair of sympathetic blue eyes, and had enlarged a nose which was not too small a one by nature. Mrs. Higginbottom's lachrymal glands had indeed been so overstrained that, when trouble was in the wind, her nose reddened whether she willed it or no, and her husband knew this signal of sorrow and loathed it. It was the Marseillaise of this house—a bugle to battle-and Mr. Higginbottom's method of conducting his domestic quarrels seemed to have been borrowed by him from the Australian aborigines, He had on several occasions taken his wife by the hair and beaten her. Mrs. Higginbottom had over and over again, after endearments of this kind, made up her mind to run away from her husband; but she had the double misfortune to contend against-of loving her daughter, and of having no friends to run away to, all her rela-

tions having quarrelled with her when she had contracted her marriage. It is true that many adorers, having previously screwed up their courage to the sticking point with her husband's whisky, had, while she was in Australia, offered to elope with her, and threatened to blow their brains out should she refuse to gratify their modest demands; but Mrs. Higginbottom was a lady by disposition as well as by birth, and this misfortune had hitherto kept her faithful to her tormentor. The truth was that like all imaginative people she could not forget that Mr. Higginbottom had once When she ran away from her been her ideal. rich parents in Sydney and married him, he was a dark muscular man, possessed of a bull's strength, and not destitute of a certain corsairlike beauty. Like most delicate women, Mrs. Higginbottom admired strength in a man beyond all things, and like all romantic ones she had her Byron at her finger ends. She therefore ran away with Mr. Higginbottom, thinking to find in

him a colonial Conrad. She soon, however, discovered, that in matters of diet at all events, and in other things as well, her lord was not all that she had wished for, or that Byron had imagined.

"Earth's coarsest bread, the garden's homeliest roots," were quite insufficient for Mr. Higginbottom's material welfare, and his mind was nourished by no kind of abstinence whatsoever. In short the deluded wife discovered at no distant date from her marriage that, though her husband had a demon's temper and a roving black eye, he had not the least particle of mind about him, and she nearly broke her heart over the discovery. Money, however, he had, or rather luck attended him, and he made it: and a daughter having been born, his wife had an obiect on whom to wreak all the affection that her husband was only too glad to dispense with. Things had gone on in this way till a rot fell upon the Australian sheepfolds, from which Pro-

vidence, or some more malignant influence, saved Mr. Higginbottom's, and the squatter made a fortune out of a national disaster. He became a millionaire and sailed for England with his wife, his daughter, his thousands, and his brutality. Then he had bought the Grange, and installed his household in it. His unfortunate wife now thought that the turning-point of her life had come. All the poet within her that had been crushed by a long residence in the bush with a brutal husband, revived once more at the sight of the Grange's gray towers, its worm-eaten tapestries, the ancestral armour, the dark-frowning family portraits, the huge fireplaces, the secret chambers; she bought a complete edition of Scott's works, and imagined herself Margaret of Branksome. Under these influences her youth was reborn in her, and the revival of her youth brought with it, unnoticed by her husband, a revival of her beauty. She left off crying and her eye brightened; she recovered her long-lost

colour, and with it a dazzling complexion; and though she was unsuccessful in inspiring her daughter (who was the most unimaginative girl on earth) with her own feeling for feudality, she drew health and happiness from it herself, and noticed at the same time that her husband drank less whisky.

The history of the family had reached this stage when Mrs. Higginbottom came down to breakfast on the morning already mentioned, and saw scaffolding erected against the dining-room window. Directly she saw it, a nameless fear took possession of her. She thought that she saw in it the death-blow to her only earthly pleasure, except her daughter. Her nose began to grow red. Mr. Higginbottom, being averse to this method his wife employed of discovering to society that trouble was in the wind, to annoy her, drank a copious draught of whisky after his breakfast, a thing that he had not done since his arrival at Masham-de-la-Poele. He then told his daughter that while

the repairs were being carried on, she and her mother had better go to Brighton.

"James," said Mrs. Higginbottom—who, from an intuition rarely granted to men, foresaw the worst—"James," she said, "you are not going to pull the old house down, are you?"

By way of reply to this appeal, Mr. Higgin-bottom had another drink. This method of expressing annoyance at his wife's conduct was one of the most successful things of its kind ever patented. It not only warmed him internally, but it also drove her from the room.

"Papa has taken to the whisky again, I see," said May Higginbottom to her mother, when they got into the drawing-room. She was a dark, tall, thin, handsome girl, with her father's eyes and hair. "Why did you speak to him in that tone of voice?" she went on, "you know that it always sends him to the bottle."

"What is he going to do to my dear old castle?" said the mother, in plaintive tones.

"Goodness knows!" said her daughter, shrugging her shoulders. It is, however, not to be credited that goodness did know what Mr. Higginbottom was going to do to the dear old castle, or that monster would undoubtedly have died suddenly by a thunderbolt. In the meantime, his wife and daughter were sent to Brighton; from thence they were ordered to the South of France, and from thence to Rome, where they were commanded to winter. During this campaign, Mrs. Higginbottom suffered under such an agony of home-sickness, that she thinned visibly, and threatened to be laid up with a serious illness.

"What is your father doing to the dear old house?" was her constant cry. At length when her fears had reached such a climax as really to threaten her health, she and her daughter received a summons home. They travelled straight through from Rome to Masham-de-la-Poele, without resting a moment on the journey, and the first sight which met their eyes on emerging from the Grange

avenue was the gilded dome of a Chinese pagoda where once a Tudor mansion had stood. The Pavilion at Brighton seemed to have been transplanted.

When Mrs. Higginbottom saw this palpable severance from a refined and long-lost past rising before her eyes, she, for the first time in her life, fully realised how possible it is for a woman to hate her husband, and this knowledge gave her power to mask her displeasure. Mr. Higginbottom was himself radiant, and, as his wife welcomed him with a smile upon her face, he greeted her more warmly than he had done for years, and told her that she was looking "darned handsome."

This word struck the opening rôle of the drama that was to follow. It awakened a sense that had long lain dormant in Mrs. Higginbottom's breast—partly from the dogged despair of misery, and partly from that neglect for personal appearance that misery so surely brings in its train. Her husband's words reminded her that her person

was still attractive. This is a dangerous feeling for a man to awaken in his wife's bosom, if he is in the habit of ill-treating her. Mrs. Higgin-bottom, on being told by her husband to issue invitations for a house-warming, felt that he had put a sword into her hand that she might well turn against his head, and avenge herself for a long series of outrages that had at last grown beyond endurance.

As for the Grange, it existed no longer. When an imaginative nature is deprived, by stress of circumstances, of its natural food, it degenerates into imbecility, or feeds on fruit that is forbidden. On the ruins of the Cyneberhts' ancestral hall, Mr. Higginbottom thought that he had reared a palace, and he led his wife and daughter through lofty rooms that blazed with gilt and Orientalisms with an eye that was watery with enthusiasm. He thought, too, that his wife's silence meant admiration, when it merely meant that she was in too great a passion to speak.

"There!" at length he said, when he had reached the ball-room. "Now you can go and issue the invitations. By the way, there is a friend of mine, whom I met in the hunting-field, coming over, in a quiet way, to dine this evening and spend the week with us—Lord Verulam. You ought to like him; he reads poetry and all that bosh. And," added this model of providing fatherhood, with a meaning smile, "he will do for the gal."

Here he pointed over his shoulder at his daughter, and then went upstairs to dress for dinner.

Mrs. Higginbottom that evening dressed herself with scrupulous care, and felt, as she walked down to the drawing-room, younger than she had done since she had married. She found Lord Verulam leaning against the marble mantel-piece, admiring his teeth in the mirror. He was a middle-sized, well-made man, with a head that might have been Byron's, if Byron had lived

till he was five-and-forty, and had not been particularly handsome. Notwithstanding this, Lord Verulam's likeness to the author of "Childe Harold" was close enough to strike Mrs. Higginbottom directly she entered the room, and to have proved its possessor's ruin. Lord Verulam had at an early age felt, that, as Nature had granted him a poet's head, she must have dowered him, however secretly, with a poet's In a search for this fancied inherifaculty. tance he had devoted the greater part of a life-time that might otherwise have been spent in the service of his country, and had written reams of rhyme that had proved too puerile for publication. At the age of forty-five, therefore, he was still on the eve of publishing a great work, and was only waiting for its issue from the press to wake up one morning and find himself famous. But this issue was perpetually being delayed by the advice of his publishers. The fact was that his lordship's relations were very

far from being anxious that the products of their kinsman's genius should see the light. They had been given the manuscripts to read. They were, for the most part, it may be, good, simple, uncultivated souls, who might or might not be judges of poetry; but it was with them a very unanimous wish that Lord Verulam's verses should not appear in print till they themselves were comfortably in their coffins. They had imparted these views to his lordship's publishers for the moment, and had placed the furtherance of their wishes on a pecuniary basis; the result of which finesse was that whenever Lord Verulam presented a volume of verse to them, those gentlemen first threw up their hands in ecstasy, and then told him that his poems wanted polishing.

"Of course, my lord," they would say to him, "if you wish to publish them as they are we shall be happy to carry out the business for you; but we do not hesitate to tell you that, if you publish them in their present form, you

will be doing your reputation an irremediable harm; for these verses are so good that they can be made much better. It is not everything, my lord, that has possibilities in it."

At these words, Lord Verulam would go away sadly, lock himself up in Verulam Abbey (built by himself on the plan of Newstead), begin to polish his verses, and his friends would breathe once more. Had Lord Verulam's eccentricities ended here society would have had small grounds for complaint — it is not every author that is content to continue polishing - but his lordship unfortunately aspired to Byronism in other forms than mere literature, and broke out now and then into rather scandalous ways of He lived two years and a half at Venice, from whence he wrote Byronic letters home; he was mixed up in a scandal or two; it is certain that in several affairs of the heart his efforts were greeted with a success not unworthy of the great man on whom he modelled himself, and his friends in England were beginning to hope that the effects of dissipation in a southern climate would leave their kinsman's bones in the city of the sea, when they received a scrawl from him, informing them that his hair was turning gray, and that he meditated an immediate return to Verulam Abbey. In due time the wanderer returned, but he returned, the country-side was horrified to see, bringing his sheaves with him; and by his sheaves on this occasion they did not mean poems. The melting tones of Tuscany were in short heard about the long deserted halls of Verulam Abbey, and they issued from a female mouth, according to text. As may readily be conjectured, from this moment, the noble owner, who was never tired of pining for a desert island, with one fair spirit for his minister, now found his aspirations for solitude gratified beyond his wildest wishes; in short, all his neighbours having cut him, he found himself living in à large house with a violent foreign woman who bullied him. He now began to pine for society; but he pined for it in vain, till he made the chance acquaintance of Mr. Higginbottom, who was at the time engaged in building his pavilion, one day when he happened to ride hunting to avoid worse ills.

The pair became close friends, as people of precisely opposite temperament often will do, and these two opposite temperaments had at least one taste in common. Lord Verulam was a three-bottle man, and Mr. Higginbottom was glad to keep him in countenance in this small eccentricity. The cellars at Verulam Abbey emptied apace; and Mr. Higginbottom, who, during his wife and daughter's absence in Rome, was a guest at Verulam Abbey, had not been a guest there above a week, when his influence over his noble host began to make itself felt. This Sir Giles Overreach of the colonies thought that he had discovered in his noble host the very man he had long been seeking—for his daughter. With Mr. Higginbottom the conception

of a plan was its execution. In three weeks he had sent the foreign woman to Tuscany; and had found out the exact state of Lord Verulam's finances. He discovered that he was still worth about two thousand a year, and that the capital which produced this sum could not be touched.

He now began to extol the pleasures of lawful love.

"You are a Byron: that's what you are!" he said one evening over his whisky and water to his host, who was at the moment a trifle overtaken. "You are a Byron! and if you don't settle down, you will end like he did—die on a sand-bank with no woman to lean against." By this phrase he painted the fatality at Missolonghi. He then produced a photograph and filled another glass. He handed this photograph to Lord Verulam. "Now look here," he went on, "we two are pals, that's what we are, and I've got a daughter—that gal—now look at her. We don't stand on any ceremony, we don't. What d'ye say to a good

strapping piece of flesh like that, God bless her!" here he shed a fatherly tear, "and ten thousand a year with her? Heh! my hearty?"

At this prospect Lord Verulam's eye darted conjugal fire. Ten thousand a year would be a godsend to him, and Mr. Higginbottom's daughter was a houri.

"Matrimony would save me," he sighed. "You are right, James."

They had got to this pitch by now.

"Matrimony might save me. When can I hope to see your daughter?"

Here he returned the photograph, and Mr. Higginbottom perceived that he had been exhibiting by accident the photograph of his wife. He however thought it prudent not to destroy too suddenly a lord's illusion.

"He is drunk," he thought, "and he will never remember. In three weeks from this day, sonney," he went on. "My den is almost ready, and you shall be the first to set your eyes on my beauty; the first of any man in the country-side." Under this understanding they parted, each man congratulating himself on a good stroke of business.

"She is a fine woman," thought Lord Verulam, "and when I have married her I will live in Italy, and catch her father in a man-trap if he attempts to approach my villa."

"Now I have got a handle to my name," thought Mr. Higginbottom, "and one that I can turn too as I wish it."

The Bard of Verulam was a simpleton in his eyes.

When, therefore, on the evening already alluded to, and three weeks subsequently to this conversation, Lord Verulam turned round from admiring his teeth in the drawing-room mirror at the Grange, and saw Mrs. Higginbottom advancing towards him, he supposed that she was her daughter and his destined wife.

"She is older than the photograph," he thought to himself; but the photograph did not do her justice. "My dear Miss Higginbottom," he began. "I am Mrs. Higginbottom. This is my daughter, whom you mistake me for."

At this instant Miss Higginbottom and her father entered the room. Lord Verulam concealed his rage and mortification under a show of surprised gallantry, and gave no sign of any kind to show that he knew that he had been played upon.

"He does not remember the photograph, thank goodness," thought Mr. Higginbottom.

But the county Lothario was at the very moment meditating vengeance. He felt that a reputation gained as a man of good fortunes was at stake; and while he paid such outward attention to his friend's daughter as the circumstances under which he met her seemed to demand, he at the same time contrived to cast a few of his most dazzling glances at the wife. Mrs. Higginbottom listened to his conversation from the first with marked interest; and when he quoted Byron, and told her that he had lived two years in the poet's

palace at Venice, her heart warmed towards him. She felt that she had at last met a man with a soul. For his part, Lord Verulam thought that he had at last met a woman with a figure; for however much he sighed for spiritual women in Spenserian stanzas, in real life his lordship preferred them embonpoint. He looked at Mrs. Higginbottom, therefore, and realised his ideal; but meanwhile he had to pay court to her daughter. To the visible satisfaction of his host, in this direction his efforts promised to be crowned with the most complete success. May Higginbottom, though she had never read "Childe Harold," seemed to appreciate the extracts from it that were quoted to her; and when Lord Verulam, gaining confidence with the circulation of the champagne, threw in a modest stanza of his own, his host's daughter beamed appreciation and threw up her eyes.

"When I was in Byron's palace in Venice, two years ago," Lord Verulam began, "I was dressing for the Princess Segnati's conversazione, in what was once the author of 'Don Juan's' dressingroom; I was tying my shoestring at the time; I looked up, and saw the poet's apparition."

"Did you see it in the looking-glass, Lord Verulam?" said the daughter of the house.

"I am irresistible this evening," thought his lordship, "I believe that] I could write tonight."

"Well, I must say that of all the charming men I have ever met——" thought Mrs. Higginbottom; and there she stopped.

"What could be better than this?" thought her husband. He was already present in the spirit at an aristocratic wedding. He saw his name in the papers as the happy father-in-law of a titled son—St. Andrew's, Wells Street—a full choral service—the Bishop of London officiating—and half a column in the Morning Post.

"Bring up another bottle of the Perrier Jouet," he exclaimed. There had already been two drunk.

At this intimation of revelry being in the air, mother and daughter hastened to leave the gentlemen to themselves.

"What a horrid man!" said Miss Higginbottom, as soon as she had reached the drawingroom. "What a horrid, odious man!"

"I am sorry to hear you speak like that of a man whom I have told you your father has set his heart upon your marrying."

"I am sorry to hear that, because papa will be disappointed. I prefer to remain single to marrying a wax-doll. The man curls his hair."

"For shame, May. Lord Verulam is one of the handsomest, and most delightfully cultivated men that I have ever met."

"What a pity that you didn't meet him before!"

At these words the blood rushed to Mrs. Higginbottom's face. Her daughter, who perceived that she had wounded her mother deeply

without in the least intending to do so, hastened to offer what consolation was in her power.

"Mamma, dear, I didn't mean to say anything unkind. I am sure I don't know what I have said to hurt you so; but I can't and won't marry Lord Verulam, that is all I meant to say, and because I have hurt you, I will tell you why."

Mrs. Higginbottom had by now recovered her self-possession.

"Why can't you marry Lord Verulam?" she asked.

"I love Joseph Winter, and he loves me."

At this answer Mrs. Higginbottom was filled with a secret joy. She did not stop to ask herself whether it was the news of her daughter's dislike to Lord Verulam that made her feel so glad, or whether it was the news of her daughter's engagement to another man. Her answer, however, to the confession betrayed the influence of neither of the two impulses.

"My dear child," she said, "Joseph Winter is a very excellent young man, and a very steady young man; but you must recollect your position a little. Mr. Winter is only a yeoman farmer; he is not a gentleman born and bred."

"Nor was papa when he married you."

Mrs. Higginbottom now felt that the sins of the parents were about to be visited on the children. She in her youth, as far as judgment was concerned, had socially sinned. She had suffered for it, too; but she had made an heroic determination to conceal her sufferings from her daughter, and she had succeeded in her wish. May Higginbottom still thought that, though her father had a rough way of speaking to her, her mother loved him.

"Papa was just as little a gentleman in the eyes of the world when you married him as Mr. Winter is," said this deluded daughter; "and you are happy with papa, are you not?"

"Yes, dearest," said Mrs. Higginbottom.

In this answer was expressed a martyr's con-

stancy. The wife was at the stake, but she would not recant. May Higginbottom saw her advantage, and hastened to tell her story.

"We were out hunting," she said, "before we left for Italy; and he opened gates for me, though he was riding a rearing horse." (Sir Lancelot himself could not have done more than this.) "He rides beautifully—and he loves me—and I love him—and he wants to marry me as soon as possible."

At this moment Mr. Higginbottom and his guest arrived from the dining-room. The host was in the highest spirits, and a glance was enough to tell his wife that he had already made considerable inroads upon temperance. His eyes were bloodshot and without speculation in them, his mouth drooped at the corners, and he talked thickly. He was full of a mock indignation at his companion's abstemiousness, and his indignation was justified, for Lord Verulam had hardly touched liquor since the ladies had left the dining-room.

"I d'noknow — what - comes - over Verulam," began Mr. Higginbottom, throwing himself heavily back against the chimney-piece; "but now that's come into-this-house — he never drinks anything. At's own house-now—he drinks like-fish."

Lord Verulam hastened to deny this soft impeachment by looking first tenderly at Mrs. Higginbottom and then sorrowfully at her husband, as one who would say: "I feel for you, madam; you see what a disgraceful state he is in."

This suggestive pantomime passed unnoticed by Mr. Higginbottom, but he resented the silence that reigned after it. Being a man of action, he was impatient of events; and when he was in his cups, and had set his mind on a thing, the world did not go round fast enough. The idea of his daughter's marriage with Lord Verulam having now completely taken possession of his brain, he was resolved that as it was to be done it should be done quickly. After the ladies had left the dining-room, therefore, he had aired these views

to his future son-in-law, who, seeing that any show of delay on his part might arouse a suspicion that might be fatal to his own designs, had not hesitated to assume an almost uncontrollable impatience to be married off the reel; and as a first step, had promised to propose for Miss Higgin-bottom's hand that very evening.

"Our friend is drunk now," he thought; "and by-and-by he will be oblivious."

But in this supposition he was in error.

The gentlemen had only joined the ladies in the drawing-room about ten minutes, when Mr. Higginbottom, having cast a score or two of suggestive glances at his guest, with a view of getting him about his business, staggered gravely to his feet, and giving his arm to his wife, proposed, in tones that meant obedience and were spoken without a blush, that they should go a turn in the garden together and look at the moonlight.

"May," he added, "you have got a cold, and so you—cannot come round the garden to see the moonlight. I d'essay Verulam, who has written a great deal about moonlight himself, though, will tell you something about it to console you while we are gone." With these words he staggered gravely on to the lawn.

Lord Verulam, left alone with the girl he had to propose to, wished that some stimulant was at hand. He knew neither how to begin nor how to end. He had promised his host that he would propose to his daughter, and he had a shrewd suspicion of what his host would look like if that promise was not fulfilled.

"Were the girl not so evidently fascinated by me," he thought, "I should have nothing to do but to tell Higginbottom that his daughter was unable to make up her mind, and to insist on no pressure being put upon her during the process. That would give me time, and time is all that I want."

Here his meditations were interrupted by Miss Higginbottom herself.

"Lord Verulam," she said, "I think it only fair to tell you that I know why we have been left together. I know why you are here. I can never marry you, Lord Verulam. I am very sorry if I give you pain; but I can never marry you."

Lord Verulam looked far from hurt. The rapture, indeed, that lighted his face on receiving this intelligence was so very real, that he was completely unable to disguise it.

He bowed, but he could say nothing, and May Higginbottom read her safety in his smile. She discovered kindness in it as well—for the first time—and determined to unbosom herself.

"You have been very considerate to me, Lord Verulam," she said, "and I think that I owe you a confidence for your consideration. The truth is, that I am engaged to be married to a Mr. Joseph Winter, a farmer, who lives near here, and whom you may have met out hunting."

Lord Verulam, upon this, assumed his Regency

air. "You honour me with your confidence, Miss Higginbottom," he said, "and I need not tell you that in my keeping your secret is safe. I say secret, because I am correct, I believe, in supposing that you have not told it to your father."

"I have not told papa about it yet."

"If you think that the advice of a man who respects you more than he can say, and who has your interest—believe what I say or not, as you like—very near at heart, is worth taking, pray avail yourself of it, and let the secret that you have entrusted to me remain a secret for the present. I feel that my advice may sound strangely in the ears of a daughter as dutiful as yourself, and you must pardon me, if it does, in the knowledge that my motives in giving it you are completely unselfish ones."

Here he bent forward, took May Higginbottom's hand and kissed it. At this instant Mr. Higginbottom and his wife passed in front of the window unnoticed by the couple in the drawing-room, and

the squatter's eye kindled with triumph as he thought he saw in Lord Verulam's attitude the absolute realisation of his brightest dreams. He left his wife's arm, and approached the window on tip-toe. These words then fell upon his ear:

"Lord Verulam, I am extremely grateful to you."

"My dear Miss Higginbottom, consider me always your slave."

This was enough for Mr. Higginbottom. Personally he would have clenched the bargain with a kiss, and marked it throughout with less formality had he been an agent in the business; but he was tolerant of manner so long as everything else was there, and he considered that in this respect his business was as good as done.

He entered the drawing-room with a jubilant step. He saw triumph in the friend's glance and satisfaction in the daughter's eye. The remainder of the evening passed as merrily as a marriage bell. As soon as the ladies had retired, the host led the way to the smoking-room. He thrust a long cigar into Lord Verulam's hands.

- "Well," he chuckled, "it's all done, isn't it?"
- "No," said Lord Verulam, "it's not at all all done."
 - "Wot d'ye mean?"
- "Your daughter wants three days to make up her mind in."
- "Oh, does she? Well, she will just make up her mind in three minutes."

With these words Mr. Higginbottom rose, seemingly for the purpose of going straight to his daughter's room, dragging her out of bed, and making her accept the husband he had provided for her then and there in her nightgown in the passage. His hand was on the smoking-room door, when his friend stopped him.

"Sit still," he said. "I will not have your daughter's inclination disturbed on my account. No one shall meddle with her. She has asked for three clear days to consider my offer in, and

three clear days she shall have, undisturbed, or I shall leave the house."

But this was the last thing in the world that Mr. Higginbottom wished to happen. Now that he had got a lord in his house, and one of congenial tastes, he was not going to let him out of it, unless he took a wife with him.

"Well," he said moodily, "as you will. I am surprised at May, I am. Well; who would have thought it! Bah! but you don't go the right way to work, my boy. Those d—d Italianos of yours have spoiled you for making headway with English gals. Wot English gals like is for a man to get to the point at once with them. None of your cursed bowing, and scraping, and hand-kissing. Leave that to Italian organ-grinders, spooning scullery-gals, and speak out like a man. Now you take my tip."

"I am obliged to you for your advice," said Lord Verulam dryly. "But I am not entirely without experience in love-making, and you

. . -

must allow me to make it in my own method."

"No offence, no offence; but I saw you through the window this evening bowing over my gal's hand. Now I give you the straight tip at once that my gal, May, is not used to this style of thing."

"What style of thing?"

"Being made love to."

"Oh, indeed."

"No. For as she has never seen a man whom I would have permitted her to marry but yourself, she has never thought of one."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, indeed. Wot d'ye take me for?"

"For the most foreseeing of fathers."

"Well, I think I can foresee a thing or two."

"Not one thing that I can foresee, I hope," thought Lord Verulam aside, and then he added, "One thing I wanted to ask you: I hope that

Mrs. Higginbottom looks upon my proposed engagement to your daughter with a favourable eye?"

"Never you mind Mrs. Higginbottom," replied her husband surlily, "I can find means to bring her to reason."

Lord Verulam now conceived hope. It was clear to him that Mrs. Higginbottom had regarded him with marked interest at dinner-time, and yet here she was evidently raising objections to his engagement with her daughter. "It is not that she doesn't like me, I see," reasoned this Lothario of the provinces, "but that she doesn't like me as a son-in-law."

Gratified beyond words by this conclusion, he went to bed to dream over it, after giving his host such a familiar filial good-night—a goodnight that was so much a son-in-law's—as to determine Mr. Higginbottom, while the joy of it still lingered in his recollection, to bring his wife to terms. He took a glass of whisky neat,

with this end in view, and then hastened to the marriage chamber.

A quarter of an hour afterwards loud screams issued from it. Lord Verulam, who was sitting up before the fire in his bedroom, wrapped in a silk fur-lined dressing-gown, reading "Don Juan," heard this ominous noise, and raised his eyebrows meaningly. He, however, made no further sign of going to the rescue, but he waited till the screams had ceased, then gave two or three Byronic smiles at himself in the looking-glass, went to bed, and dreamt of triumph.

The next morning Mrs. Higginbottom appeared at breakfast with her nose red. This signal was so well known throughout the household, that those of the servants who had not had aural demonstration of the fact knew that Mr. Higginbottom had beaten his wife, as certainly as if they had seen him doing so. The meal was performed in gloomy silence. Mr. Higginbottom ate freely, but feared that his wife's cries for

mercy had penetrated to Lord Verulam's room, and he was not sorry when a summons from his gamekeeper called him away from the table.

He had no sooner left the room than Lord Verulam gave Mrs. Higginbottom a glance that told her that he had heard the evidence of her overnight sufferings.

"Do not look at me," said she. "Do not look at me, Lord Verulam. I cannot bear it."

"Your screams last night curdled my blood. Had they continued another minute, no considerations would have prevented me from flying to your assistance."

It may have been that, as Mrs. Higginbottom's shoulders were still aching with her husband's blows, the wish may have passed through her mind that Lord Verulam had banished all considerations a minute or two sooner, and had come to her rescue really instead of only thinking about it. But she said nothing.

Lord Verulam drew nearer.

"It is useless, my dear Mrs. Higginbottom," he began, "my attempting any longer to disguise my feelings for you. We poets, you know, are ever creatures of impulse; it is not our fault if we offend, it is sometimes not our misfortune." At this point he looked at the lady with shallow tenderness and possessed himself of her hand.

There is no doubt that Mrs. Higginbottom ought to have now got up and rung the bell and called for her daughter, and had recourse to her smelling-salts, and done a hundred other things before falling into hysterics on the hearth-rug; it is however useless to disguise the fact that she did none of these things. The truth of it was that the long-suffering woman had at last come to an end of what had once been a large stock of patience. Wife-beating, like every other cure, may be carried to excess, and Mr. James Higgin-bottom was soon to experience the force of the truth.

At the present moment, however, he reappeared in the dining-room, full of other distractions.

"Well, this is the most extraordinary thing," he said; "I believe that we had a near escape, some of us, from being last night murdered in our beds."

"You do not surprise me in the least," said Lord Verulam. "I thought myself that there were burglars in the house. I heard cries that seemed cries for help, and was, when they suddenly ceased, on the point of coming to the rescue."

At this speech Mr. Higginbottom's complexion lost all its roses. He failed signally in an attempt to meet his friend's eye as he answered him:

"You must have been dreaming! I was awake all night, and didn't hear a sound except rats."

"The rats in this house," said Lord Verulam, "must be large and combative."

At this Mrs. Higginbottom laughed hysteri-

by a look. Then he proceeded to tell his guest the story he had recently heard from the keeper who, while on his beat in the woods at the bottom of the park, had seen a man deliberately planting a ladder against one of the windows." At this instant May Higginbottom entered the room. "Don't be frightened, May dear," said her father, "there is nothing to be frightened about. The man has got away this time without being recognised, but he won't do it again, I bet!"

The colour, which had forsaken May Higginbottom's cheeks, now returned to them.

"Have you sent for the police?" she asked tremblingly.

"No," said her father, "I have not. The man," he went on, "who cannot protect his goods and chattels, and keep his property when he has got it, without the aid of the police, should have his goods taken from him and given to those who can."

1

These words were prophetic. At four o'clock that afternoon May Higginbottom, who had left home by herself on horseback about an hour previously, was engaged in a deep conversation with a burly, clear-complexioned, good-looking young man of about thirty years of age, in a cover on the top of a hill within sight of the gilt dome of her father's palace.

"The day after to-morrow night then," she said, "at twelve."

"Whereabouts are the steel traps though," said Mr. Joseph Winter.

"There is one just under my window, and another under papa's."

"Are you certain that there ain't any more about?"

"What a coward you are!"

"My precious, I love you more than ever; but I don't want to be caught in a steel trap."

"Very well, then, as you are so timid you had better not come again. Be round the corner,

outside the lodge gate, on the night of the ball, at twelve o'clock, in the tandem. I will join you at a quarter-past. You must have a relay of horses along the road, and before morning we ought to be on board the Guernsey packet. Do you understand?"

"I understand."

"Good-bye."

She gave the reins to her horse, and was gone like a flash of lightning. Her lover looked after her disconsolately.

"I had a lucky escape last night," he began after a minute or two. This was in reference to his exploit on the ladder. "In another minute that man would have recognised me, and all would have been over. Fancy old Higginbottom using steel traps! I should like to catch him in one himself."

But Fate had destined Mr. Higginbottom for a bitterer trap than the one he had set to catch burglars. His wife, tired at last of his cruelty, and assailed at the same moment by the insidious arguments of his fancied friend, had found herself unable to resist the prospect which had been unfolded to her of freeing herself from a thankless slavery, and passing the remainder of her days in Italy with a man who might have been Byron's twin brother, and who had assured her that it wanted but the sympathy of a woman like herself to make him his equal in fame.

These two then elaborated their guilty plans, and had arranged to fly on the evening of the ball, at almost identically the same hour in which May Higginbottom had arranged to elope with Joseph Winter.

Threatened thus with a double desertion, Mr. James Higginbottom recovered his usual spirits, and, as the day of disaster drew near, became complacency itself personified. The ball—the first he had given since he had rebuilt the Grange—was to be considered in the light of a house-warming; the whole country-side was invited, and

as his daughter had promised to give her answer to Lord Verulam's proposal the day before the festivity, he looked forward with the utmost confidence to seeing her and his noble guest open the first quadrille as an engaged couple. That his daughter would in the end refuse Lord Verulam's offer he did not for a moment believe.

"Well, my boy," he said to Lord Verulam, as they were strolling in front of the house on the morning of the day before the dance. "Well," he said, "to-day you will know all."

Lord Verulam, having in the anxiety attending his preparations for departure on the ensuing evening with his friend's wife completely forgotten all about his daughter, was at first taken aback by this speech.

"Know all!—What?" he said, taking his cigar from his lips.

"What? Why, May's answer of course."

"Oh, you were speaking of that. Yes, to-day I expect to be made happy. I am glad that you

have introduced the subject," he went on, "as I wanted to tell you that it is my particular wish that, should your daughter's decision be adverse to my hopes, you will not permit yourself to exhibit any warmth towards a lady for whom I have the greatest admiration, and whose decision I feel confident will be actuated by fine motives, however much I may have cause to deplore it."

"Damn your hypocritical canting!" replied Mr. Higginbottom, who was as free from that vice himself as he was from all shame. "Damn your hypocritical canting," he said again. "If I didn't know you to be one of the right sort, I should keep my eye upon you when you get to that sort of palavering. The first time I went to the Colonies I made fast friends with a man who talked in that style, and he stole my cow, Damme! I remember the circumstances perfectly. Look here now—this is straight: don't you talk any more nonsense about my gal's refusing you, and so on, because she knows better than to do it. If

she was to do it, I shouldn't exhibit any warmth, as you call it. Oh no; by no means! But I should just lock her up in her room and feed her on bread and water till reason was restored to her, and postpone the ball."

At these words, Lord Verulam saw his schemes in danger. The ball was the cover under which he purposed leaving the Grange with the proprietor's wife. If Miss Higginbottom's refusal of him, therefore, got to her father's ears, all his schemes would be thrown into disarray. He lost no time in having an interview with his proposed fiancle.

"My dear Miss Higginbottom," he said, "you have still, I suppose, no wish to marry me?"

"None."

"And you would no doubt prefer your intention in this respect kept secret from your father?"

"I really don't particularly care."

"Indeed! And yet if you refuse me to-day

he is going to lock you up in your bed-room, and postpone the ball."

May Higginbottom looked as if this intelligence was fatal.

"Oh dear!" she said; "oh dear, what shall I do?" She too saw, in the postponement of the ball, the frustration of her schemes. "What shall I do?" she cried for the third time.

"I will tell you," said Lord Verulam, who saw a meaning in this distress. "Let me go to your father and tell him that you have consented to be my wife. I am so anxious to be your friend," he went on, noticing the lady's surprise at this recipe for her dilemma, "I am so anxious to be your friend that I will be party to this social fraud, if fraud it can be called; that is to say, if the concealment of your engagement to Mr. Winter for a day or two from your father's knowledge will serve you any good."

The penetrating glance with which his lordship accompanied these last words made May Hig-

ginbottom believe that her secret was in his keeping.

"I accept your offer," she said, "I am in your hands."

An hour before dinner Lord Verulam told the squatter that he had good news for him.

"Your daughter has consented to become my wife—congratulate me!"

These words fell upon Mr. James Higginbottom's ears as gratefully as the "cease firing" does on the ears of the victorious soldier who has borne unhurt the heat and burden of the battle. The rest of the evening was abandoned by him to potations bottle-deep, and he drank to his own perdition several times over uproariously.

"The woman," he said, raising his champagne glass, "who has a man like you, Verulam, my boy, to lean against, is to be congratulated and envied at the same time. Envied for her good luck and congratulated for her sense in laying hold of it."

Here he drank to his daughter. As he was

in the act of doing so Lord Verulam and Mrs. Higginbottom exchanged a glance full of meaning. The squatter put down his half-emptied glass suddenly.

"Ho! Something has chilled me," he cried, pressing his hand on his heart. "I haven't felt like that for years."

"When did you feel like it last?" said Lord Verulam. "What is the matter with you, my good fellow?"

"I had a pain through my heart like a knife," said Mr. Higginbottom. "I felt like that the evening before that —— Varey stole my cow."

At the significance of this allusion a smile appeared upon his lordship's lips; but it had a different effect upon the woman who had consented presently to leave her home for him. It touched her better feelings. She saw a certain piteousness in it, and she felt sorry for the man whom she was by-and-by to betray. Had her

husband shown the least kindness to her during the evening, it is probable that she would have extricated herself even then from the toils that were around her, and remained a faithful wife. But no warnings from above or below could teach Mr. Higginbottom courtesy to his consort, or awake him to a sense of the vengeance which hung so imminently above his head. His brutal mirth grew wilder and wilder. Again and again he drank to Lord Verulam's health.

"Here's to the wife," he said, winking at his lordship.

"Thanks," replied Lord Verulam, looking at Mrs. Higginbottom.

"Oh, never mind her!" said Mr. Higginbottom, following his glance. "She's a jade, she is. I don't drink to her. It won't be through her that you'll get happiness."

"Indeed! I am surprised that you should say that! Since I have been under this roof I have always experienced the greatest kindness

and hospitality from Mrs. Higginbottom; kindness and hospitality which I shall never forget, and which, now that I am about to become so soon related to her, I shall hope in some degree to repay."

"D—n your sentimentality!" said the squatter.
"Keep that for your honeymoon. Let us get to business."

This was a signal for the ladies to leave the room.

"The business," which related to settlements, was carried on through the evening. Mr. Higgin-bottom assisted the workings of a mind not eminently legal by copious draughts of whisky and water. As he was going upstairs to the smoking-room he met his wife. She laid her hand on his shoulder, and looked at him steadily. Mr. Higgin-bottom once more felt the spasm that had assailed him at dinner and when his friend had stolen his cow. He shook his wife off roughly.

"What now!" he said brutally. "Wot d'ye

mean by putting your claw suddenly on me, like that, eh?"

"James, do you remember the old days when we were first married?"

"Thank Heaven that I have nearly forgotten them!"

"Have you no feeling for me left?"

"None whatever, except that you are an incumbrance. I have that feeling for you, and I wish I was rid of you."

"Why do you wish that?"

"Because you are a jade, and always thwart my wishes."

"I will not do so any more."

"That's what you always say."

"This time I will keep my word."

There was an earnestness and a penetration in his wife's tones as she made this promise, that startled Mr. Higginbottom for an instant out of the mood of drunken exultation into which prolonged and frequent draughts of whisky and water

had for some time elevated him. He followed his wife as she walked down the passage to her bedroom with a suspicious eye.

"D—n her!" he said. "Wot does she mean by talking to me in that tone of voice? I have half a mind to— Well, I won't to-night—to-night, in which my best hopes have been fulfilled. And yet that sort of thing, if it isn't checked, leads to the very devil! Yes, I think I will just go and give her a strap or two for that. Yet after all—I've had a good time of it to-day—so I'll let her off. Yes, I'll let her off this time. Lord Verulam—Lady Verulam—Lord Verulam—I feel quite bosky this evening; but if I am drunk"—here he reeled heavily against the banister—"it is with joy! I'll go to bed to dream of it! No, I won't; I'll go and have some more whisky."

Mr. Higginbottom's enthusiasm was sustained by whisky all the next day, and it culminated in the evening when, to the music of Coote and Tinney's band, in the presence of a large num-

ber of neighbours who had driven, some of them. fifteen miles for a sight of the Asiatic palace. he saw Lord Verulam lead out his daughter for the first quadrilles. At this sight the squatter's eyes literally reeled in his head. His triumph was indeed complete. His daughter in the arms of a lord; his wife upstairs with a bad headache; nothing present to mar the enjoyment of the minute. The host indeed was so carried away with his own triumphs that the presence of his guests was completely forgotten. supper-room, champagne flowed in almost brutal profusion, and far more than an average share of it flowed down the throat of the master of the house. The lights, the music, the wine, added to the prolonged satisfaction of seeing the standing proofs of his own triumphant ingenuity, in the spectacle of his daughter hanging on Lord Verulam's arm, at last turned a brain which had been inflamed to fever by carousals protracted for days, and prolonged through nights. Higginbottom became victim to a delusion.

thought that his daughter had been married that morning instead of having been only engaged. At a quarter to twelve, the time arranged by May Higginbottom for her flight, her father stopped her in the middle of a waltz, and told her that it was time to retire. The squatter's mind had gone back to the memory of his own wedding, which had been celebrated with the ceremonial fashionable about the time of "The Bride of Lammermoor." There had been a dance at a friend's house, and at twelve o'clock the bride and bridegroom had withdrawn themselves. When May Higginbottom heard her father's words she started as if she had been stabbed. His strange manner, the sudden interruption in the dance, the confusion among the guests, all led her to suppose that her plan had been discovered. She was ready to faint, and allowed him to lead her out of the throng of dancers.

"What do you mean, papa?" she said, as soon as she was sufficiently mistress of her emotion to speak.

- "Your husband is waiting for you," said Mr. Higginbottom.
 - "My husband?" said the terrified girl.
- "Yes, fooley! Your husband, Lord—Lord Verulam."

May Higginbottom now looked at her father, and saw that his brain was on fire. She hastened to take advantage of the hour. In a quarter of an hour she was well on the road to the nearest sea-port, in Joseph Winter's tandem, and before her presence had been generally missed.

By half-past twelve, the following commentaries on the evening's entertainment were being circulated in the ball-room:

- "Where is Miss Higginbottom?"
- "Where is Lord Verulam?"
- "Where is Mrs. Higginbottom?"
- "Mr. Higginbottom's manner is most peculiar."
- "Never mind his manner while his champagne is so good."

The solacing philosophy contained in this remark did not long subdue a general impression in the ball-room that something was wrong. The dancers lost their energy; many looked for their wraps and ordered their carriages; the party began to break up. The signals of departure at last attracted the attention of the host. He entreated the deserters to stay.

"Do not spoil my evening," he said. "This kind of thing only happens to a man once in his life. Don't throw cold water on my triumph."

He was standing in the middle of the ball-room when he said this, and at the moment a servant approached him with a letter. It was Mrs. Higginbottom's farewell to her husband. It was a brief one.

"Your brutality," it ran, "has become more than I can bear. I have left you for ever with Lord Verulam. You told me last night that you wished you were rid of me, and I told you that I would never more thwart your wishes. I have kept my word."

The squatter received this blow as a man in a mêlée often does a mortal wound. He dropped

the letter, turned ghastly pale, but remained standing with his jaw fallen and eyes fixed in a hideous stare. His appearance was so ghastly that screams arose from the ladies. A general stampede ensued from the ball-room.

Few men will stand by a stranger when they think he is going to have a fit. Misfortune makes all men pariahs. Two or three servants, however, supported the master of the house to an ottoman in the hall, and sent for the doctor.

Meanwhile the guests dispersed like a flock of frightened sheep, and only some fifteen or twenty, whose carriages were slow in coming, were spectators of the last scene of this drama of vulgar life. As Mr. Higginbotton was, after a rest on the ottoman, being partly led and partly carried across the hall to be taken upstairs to bed, he received the last shock of calamity, in the intelligence blurted out by a footman, in spite of all attempts to prevent him, that the gamekeeper, who had two nights before seen a man planting a ladder against Miss Higginbottom's windows, had recently, while cross-

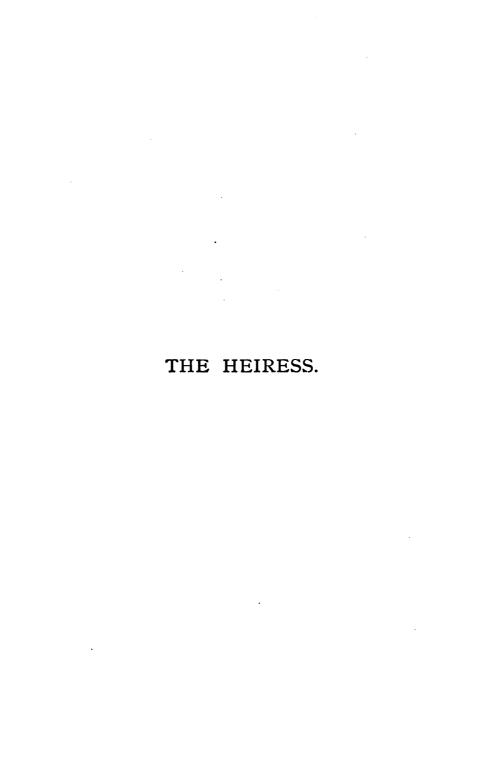
ing a neighbouring common, been spectator of her flight.

This last blow, which robbed him of child as well as wife, seemed to awake the squatter to a complete realisation of his position. Treachery was in the air. The blood rushed to his head; foam flecked his lips. He was like Richard the Third on the field of Bosworth. He gave one hoarse cry of rage, that had nothing human in it, and then, in spite of the combined efforts of four men to hold him, he rushed upon the man who had brought the fatal news, hurled him to the ground, and buried his teeth in his throat.

It seemed for a moment or two as if no power would induce him to loosen his hideous hold; and when he was at last plucked off his victim, the man was found to be unconscious from fear and loss of blood.

After having been safely secured and watched all night it was found necessary, on the following morning, to have Mr. Higginbottom removed to a lunatic asylum, of which he was for six weeks one of the most dangerous and violent patients. At last he was released, but lived afterwards under the constant surveillance of a man of great strength and experience, who was hired for him as his valet, but who was in reality his keeper.

The divorce proceedings having been completed, Higginbottom became the wife of Lord Verulam. But, though she lived for the rest of her life in Italy with a man who professed to be a poet, she soon discovered that happiness sought by the sacrifice of honour is sometimes no happi-She lived a miserable life, neglected ness at all. by her present husband, and living in constant dread of the vengeance of her former one. was her daughter happier in her choice. Joseph Winter soon discovered that she agreed with her husband in nothing but in a mutual desire to leave a neighbourhood associated in her mind with the most painful recollections, in which she could get nobody to call upon her, and in which the Chinese pagoda erected by her father is the sole memorial of her family and of its fate.





THE HEIRESS.*

CYNTHIA DE LA POELE was a little over twenty when her father and mother perished in a frightful railway accident, and left her heiress to one of the finest estates in the county, and an income that was princely. De la Poele Court was a ducal residence in itself, and Cynthia had about thirty thousand a year to keep it up with.

When the good people who lived within a radius of ten miles from De la Poele Court read Francis de la Poele's will in the *Illustrated London News*, they were filled with astonishment and regret: astonishment that the deceased gentleman should have been so wealthy; regret that they had not made better use of his wealth

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while he was yet alive. "If he had not married that terrible woman," was the cry which rose from many a homestead to heaven, "what a charming fellow he would have been!"

It was the woman, indeed, who had undone them! For (beyond the fact that he was what is called a character) to Francis de la Poele personally—as his name might indicate—no objection could be taken. He was the last indeed of a family that had been a family in the days of Rufus, and when he first came to settle on his Blankshire estate, as a newly-married man, the country-side called with one accord to congratulate him. Then the sad truth oozed out that his wife had been a Milanese ballet-dancer, and then the sadder truth oozed out that theatrical people were still her constant guests (who had not seen those terrible yellow-headed women at the railway station?), and the good people of Blankshire gathered up their garments and left the place, comforted in the conviction that they were doing

right in not calling, by the memory of the scant hospitality they had enjoyed when they had called. They shook their heads, therefore, sighed, and departed; but not before the proprietor, on his side, had wished them at the deuce.

Francis de la Poele had always had his own way in the world since he could walk, and he was sick of life before he was half-way through He thought his wife and child not bad; he tolerated a few friends: he was certain that his neighbours were dunces; he had a penchant for the family seat; he had bought up several brands. of the finest champagnes; and when Perrier Jouet couldn't banish ennui, he went to Paris. wife, a dark-eyed Italian, liked roses and riding, and spent most of her spare time in wishing that she had had a son instead of a daughter; she thought her husband a natural (except in his. taste for champagne, which she reciprocated), and she had sense enough to let him go on in his. own way, and to go unmolested on hers.

Thus years passed away, De la Poele Court remaining a ghastly blank in the country-side's call-books, but the owners contriving to exist not-withstanding, till Death overtook them one afternoon at Abergele as they were eating ham sandwiches in a first-class railway carriage and bewailing the unsympathetic nature of their daughter; and their daughter became their sole and absolute heir.

With that daughter's real character both father and mother had remained almost entirely ignorant, and with what they did know of her they had found little in common. From an early age indeed she had been a thorn in their sides. The first thing that dawned upon the girl's growing intelligence was that the neighbours looked on her father and mother askance, and from the moment she perceived this, nothing would induce her to go outside the park. Her father laughed at her; her mother with more directness called her a mule; but Cynthia remained firm. This was a fancy quaint

enough to be disquieting; but her fancies did not end here. She next manifested a repugnance to the society which now and then came down from London for a visit; in short, on the arrival of anybody with yellow hair, Cynthia remained in her bed-room. Mr. and Mrs. de la Poele at first told their daughter that this sort of thing was simply sinful, but when she declined to see the matter in this light, they changed their ground, and told her that it wasn't healthy, and that if she was determined to isolate herself, she must have a suite of rooms to herself to do it in. This was the crown of the girl's ambition, and she demanded that the thing should be done, and that she should be given masters. Upon this, her mother who was a devout Catholic, but who knew more about dancing than orthography, told her that she was a wicked abandoned baggage, and assured her that if she was not careful she would one day find herself in a place which politeness prevents us from naming, but where culture is

found to be of not the faintest use. Francis de la Poele, however, now stepped in and decreed, in no uncertain tones, that there was only one intolerable thing in the world, and that was boredom; and that since Cynthia had determined to make herself a nuisance, she must have her own way. The best masters were had twice a week from London; three rooms were furnished in an unused wing; artificial jumps were made in a distant part of the park; she was given a horse and a piano, and a complete educational series, and she was conjured to be a good girl, and do what she liked with herself, and amuse herself, and instruct herself, but for God's sake not to bore her papa. Cynthia acted upon this advice to the letter. She troubled her anxious parents very little with her society. The time not passed in riding was devoted to the library; she there made the discovery that she had a talent for music and drawing; in the park she learned that she had a fine seat on horseback; she soon had no more need of leaping lessons; and then she plunged into John Stuart Mill.

Then came her father and mother's death, and a young life, free and unconfined as the winds, suddenly found itself saddled with the responsibilities of property.

It was clear, of course, that a handsome girl of twenty, with thirty thousand a year could not live alone; a husband was manifestly what was wanted; but as that commodity was not forthcoming, and as, if rumour was to be believed, Cynthia had not evinced the faintest inclination for the holy state, the next best substitute her guardians could think of was a maiden aunt.

Miss Ernestine de la Poele, a lady of fifty, with pronounced High Church views, had therefore been chosen, interviewed, and despatched to Blankshire, to act as companion to the heiress; to bore her, that is to say, or make a friend of her, as fate might decree.

This event was the prologue which set this

comedy of quiet life in action. A week after Miss Ernestine de la Poele's arrival in Blankshire, the following letter was received from her by the trustees:

"De la Poele Court,

"Masham-de-la-Poele,

"Blankshire.

"To the Trustees of the late FRANCIS DE LA POELE, deceased.

"MY DEAR SIRS,

"You will regret to learn that I have found the duties, which, respect for my late poor dear brother's memory forced me to accept, more arduous than I can bear.

"It is with regret that I write it, but I find my niece Cynthia not only wholly without instruction in the principles of a good Churchwoman, but engrossed also in studies of a most impious nature, which have taken such root in her mind that she entirely declines to be guided by me, either in her duty to religion or to her neighbours!

"No entreaty or command on my part will induce her to accompany me to the charming week-day services we have at Startleigh on Saints' days, and I firmly believe that she only goes to church on Sundays to give an example to the servants! This, of course, is most shocking—but this is not all. It seems that during my late poor dear brother's lifetime a coldness sprang up between him and the good people of the neighbourhood. Decency, no less than respect for my late poor dear brother's memory, prevents my assigning a reason for conduct which, I feel assured you will agree with me, was prompted by upright social considerations.

"Since my poor dear brother's death, as this obnoxious element has also been removed, the neighbours, who are extremely kind, have wished to do all that was neighbourly to his daughter, and have been good enough to call. I am sorry to have to tell you, however, that Cynthia has not only flatly refused to see them, but has

actually shown so little sense of decency as to write and tell them that she has too much self-respect to receive the visits of people who were too proud to call upon her dead mother!!!

"I must ask you, if you are desirous of my staying on here, to bring a personal influence to bear upon my niece at once—and I shall be obliged if you will have a personal interview with her without delay.

"Believe me,

"Yours very faithfully,
"ERNESTINE CAROLINE DE LA POELE."

When the trustees received this letter they all three mutually cursed their fate. They saw, indeed, breakers ahead. They had scarcely ever seen their ward; but they knew how she had been brought up, and they had heard of her wilful nature, of her fanciful disposition, of her abstruse studies. Each man bought a copy of the "Duties of Guardians." They then dined

together at a club, assumed an outward indifference, drank freely, and started for De la Poele Court next morning by an early train, expecting the worst.

It seemed that Francis de la Poele's eccentric nature lived after death in this appointment of trustees, for though they had all three been his friends at college, they had seen nothing of him since, and they had seen as little of each other.

Mr. Leonard Welstead was a squire in the north of England. He had left Oxford a rampant Republican; but he had seen the error of his ways—or rather had discovered an aged Conservative uncle with large estates and a tendency to paralysis—and he had changed his front adroitly. His grief at his uncle's decease was, as a consequence, assuaged by the recollection of his possessions, and a repentance for early follies was rendered more real by the vigour with which, as member for the deceased man's borough, he advocated the views of an extreme Conservatism. As

the moneyed man of the trio, he looked upon his coadjutors in this lately imposed trust much as the master of the chorus looks upon his satellites—a wave of the wand and obedience. He was fat and fifty, with a double chin.

Mr. James Oldmixon, the second guardian, was an aggravated mystery. He was one of those men who are hardly ever seen to drink, yet whose noses are indisputable facts, and who, though they are abstemious to a fault in public in matters of diet, might well serve a painter as models for Few people knew what Mr. Oldmixon did, and those few concealed the fearful mystery; no one seemed to know where he lived. He was, however, to be heard of at Tattersall's, was seen occasionally on a racecourse, and was known at a club or two. He evinced not the faintest outward interest in the business on which he was now engaged, but sat for the most part silent, save for guttural gurgles, watching his companions narrowly, and twitching a bloodshot eye.

The third trustee was a Mr. Clarence Herbert, a pale, tall man, with long whiskers, who owned a small flat in a good part of town, looked upon the world simply as a coloured show, and went about entreating everybody to be reasonable.

The three travelled down to Masham-de-la-Poele in the same railway carriage, and throughout a long and tedious journey no word passed between them of the trial in store. Immediately on entering the compartment Mr. Welstead drew on a black velvet travelling-cap, glared round on the occupants as if he was going to condemn every man of them to death, and then plunged into the *Morning Post*; Mr. James Oldmixon bought the *Sporting Times* upon the first opportunity that presented itself; and Mr. Clarence Herbert sighed profusely, and read Matthew Arnold's poems.

Arrived at Masham-de-la-Poele, Mr. Welstead and Mr. Herbert climbed into the De la Poele Court dog-cart, and waited with suppressed irri-

tation for their companion in adversity to join them. For his part, Mr. Oldmixon, having penetrated by a circuitous route into the refreshment bar, marked their rising impatience, through a well-screened window, with a brandy-cold in his right hand. Of these he had three, not unflavoured with some badinage with the barmaid. Matters indeed were getting tolerably advanced in this direction, when Mr. Herbert was seen descending languidly from the dog-cart, his patience having been by now nearly exhausted. Upon this Mr. Oldmixon pressed Hebe's hand, drained his glass, and, meeting him on the doorstep with a face full of discovery, told him that the up train was at five forty-five.

"I thought I had better make certain about it," he said, mounting to his seat.

A drive of four miles was performed in silence. It was the silence of "The Ring" before the fight commences! Each man breathed heavily, and watched for the towers of De la Poele Court

to rise among the oak woods, and each man wished that he might never see them rise. When at length they were undoubtedly visible, and not a quarter of a mile off, Mr. Welstead paled slightly, and opened his oracular jaws.

"This—ahem!" he said, "this is an affair full of responsibility—full of responsibility—and—we shall require to be firm as well as indulgent. We must be, in short—tender but resolved."

"Whatever we are, let us be reasonable," said Mr. Herbert.

"The up train is at five forty-five," said Mr. Oldmixon.

At this each man sighed relief. A general feeling prevailed that if anything could save them it would be the up train; and the thought of it was as a sweet-smelling savour as they drove up to the hall door.

Cynthia met her guardians in the entrance-hall. She was in her riding-habit, for she had just come in from a gallop in the park, and the exercise

had heightened a colour which was always brilliant, and had brightened a pair of the bluest eyes in the world. She was tall, and had that kind of elegance which is inborn, and which, in her case, had been developed by exercise—an elegance which made each movement a picture, which gave tone to a manner singularly outspoken and frank, and exhaled an atmosphere of the most exquisite high breeding. But it was the high breeding of one of Nature's gentlewomen; it had no flavour in it of society. Her manners, indeed, were those of a wood-nymph rather than of a woman of the world, and while they had in them no touch of loudness, they were filled with the freedom that is ignorant of conventional form. Her hair, which grew in splendid dark masses, was tied in a simple knot behind; but in front it curled and waved over a forehead white as marble, though to a Greek's taste it might have seemed too high.

The glance which the heiress threw upon her guardians as they came forward to meet her was

a revelation; it was the history of the inner life; it was the glance of Artemis—of the virgin huntress: a glance ignorant of the littleness of the world, too open to have looked into society, but clear with the spirit that it had drawn from the familiar spectacle of Nature's beauties, with the memories of dim heaths lying solemn under the sacred dawn, of breezy uplands coloured with the lights of morning, of sunset-lighted valleys freed from the tread of man—a glance open, innocent, and fearless, bright as the day itself, and which to a Greek perception would instantaneously have revealed the goddess.

When the guardians met it their countenances fell. It affected them as if it had been electrical. They looked upon the ground, and twitched their hands nervously. Mr. Welstead had never been out of countenance in the House of Commons, but now he wished himself up to his neck in a horsepond; so indeed did his companions. Their embarrassment was complete. Silence reigned for an instant distressingly, and then Mr. Herbert, who

was less confused than his companions, bethought him, and asked after the maiden aunt.

"Aunt Ernestine," said Cynthia, "has got a headache. Why do people have headaches? I don't understand them. However, aunty has one this morning, so you must put up with my solitary company at luncheon. This is the way to the dining-room."

Arrived there, she helped them in profusion to what was spread on a bountiful board, though she would eat nothing herself—she had probably had her meal of ambrosia in the forest. She waited upon her guardians herself, she gave them clean plates and clean knives and forks when occasion required, and with her own white hands she crowned their often-emptied glasses with Perrier Jouet that had been *frappeed* to the moment. Then, when that time which comes to all had begun to come upon the guardians, when the sorrowful conviction is forced upon the *gourmet* that he can eat no more, she produced some claret and left them to themselves.

"When you want to talk business you will find me in the summer-house," she said. "Prayring if you want anything."

Left to themselves, the three gentlemen attacked the bottle pretty smartly—they were nervous and needed it—and then fell to talking in subdued tones (as if some sacred presence might still be lingering in the room) about their ward.

"That," said Mr. Clarence Herbert, filling his glass with a sigh, "is the most beautiful creature that Nature has ever made. Heigho!"

"It is desirable that she should be married as soon as possible," said Mr. Welstead, with the tone of a chairman of committees.

"Married!" cried Mr. Herbert, in a loudish voice. "Married! My dear Welstead," he went on, his excitement growing with each word, "the idea of marriage in connection with such a paragon as that is blasphemy—pure blasphemy!"

"How, sir!" said Mr. Welstead, Conservatism and claret rising within him, "how!" he said.

"My dear Mr. Herbert, pray lay aside your

flippancy, and—and—your—I know not what—in the face of such a sacred trust as this. Our ward is no doubt," he went on, "possessed of very considerable personal charms."

"Personal charms!" exclaimed Mr. Herbert, in derisive disdain. "Personal charms! My good Welstead! Why, she is Aphrodite! she is Thalia! she is Erato! she is Artemis! she is—"

"She is waiting for us in the summer-house," murmured Mr. Oldmixon, quietly; "and," he added, rising from his chair, "the up train is at five forty-five."

This was, as it were, the signal for battle; each man metaphorically girded up his loins. Mr. Welstead charged a glass with sherry; Mr. Herbert passed his fingers through his curls; Mr. Oldmixon attacked a flask of maraschino in the absence of a spirit more fortifying; and then they prepared to advance.

The windows were open, and the lawn lay before them, stretching gently down to the arbour in which the fair proprietress sat, awaiting their counsel and their lore. They could see the outline of her slim figure, finely set off by her riding habit, relieved against the light green of the summer foliage. They felt instinctively also that those strange eyes were fixed upon them, and the summer-house was at least fifty yards off, and there was no way of approaching it from the rear. Each man felt that he had lunched less lightly than he was wont to do; each man wished himself in London; and then each man looked at the other to lead the forlorn hope.

Assuming an air of official dignity—within the reach only of a man who has received a deputation or presided at a City banquet—Mr. Leonard Welstead led the way. His step was measured, but he was conscious that he had left his hat in the entrance hall, and the flies made for his bald head. Mr. Herbert affected a dreamy demeanour and glanced about him suavely, but he had weak knees, and the slope found them out; and Mr. Oldmixon, whose deportment was at all times a

subject for banter to his friends, had on this occasion no stick to assist a trembling gait, and without one he was as a ship with her steerage apparatus broken. The three arrived one by one at the arbour, each man a more distinct failure than his fellow, and they knew it.

Their ward's first words did not tend to reassure them.

"I should like to say something before you begin," she said. All listened with ears erect. Cynthia went on, her eyes fixed on a view of distant downs: "Whatever arrangement you may suggest," she said, "as to the management of the property, I should like to be subject to one wish of my own—I wish to dedicate half my income yearly to public charities—"

These words fell like a thunderbolt upon her audience: the perspiration broke out on Mr. Welstead's forehead.

"My dear Miss de la Poele," he stammered; his tongue clave then to the roof of his mouth. "To three public charities," Cynthia went on, "in equal donations to each."

"Now, do let us be reasonable, my dear Miss de la Poele," cried Mr. Herbert, "now do let us be reasonable, I mean——"

"The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals," continued Cynthia, "because I love my horse and dog; the Dramatic Fund, because my mother was a ballet-dancer, so that I have a vested interest in the profession; and the Children's Hospital, because I think a suffering child must be the saddest thing in the world. I shall think it kind of you," she went on, "if you will accede to my wish in this matter for the year—after that you know I shall be my own mistress."

For a moment or two silence reigned complete: at last Mr. Leonard Welstead cleared his throat and found his tongue.

"My dear Miss de la Poele," he began,
"your wish does infinite credit to the kindness

of your heart; but you must allow me to say that it shows an ignorance of the world's ways which the peculiar circumstances attending your bringing up fully indeed account for—fully—yes, fully—but which you must try to correct as soon as possible—yes, as soon as possible."

"I have seen nothing of the world's ways," said Cynthia, simply, "and what I have heard of them has taught me only to despise them."

Mr. Welstead now looked wildly round on his companions for help. They were, indeed, embarked upon a surging sea! What point were they to steer for? that was the question. Mr. Herbert presently seized the tiller.

"The world, my very dear Miss de la Poele," he suddenly said with a sigh, "is undoubtedly the mart of arrant rascality. There you are perfectly right; but it is a great mistake for young persons like you to take this truth too seriously to heart; it destroys the palate for life, it spoils the faculty for living. Life is like a Shakespearian play; it

is like a novel of Balzac's; it is like a study of George Eliot's. (I speak to you in this way, because I know that you have read.) Remember, my very dear Miss de la Poele, I beg of you, that though there are tears in life, there is laughter as well; yes, plenty of laughter as well."

"I see nothing in life to laugh at," said Cynthia gravely.

A creature of the woods and fields, an ideal nature that had not as yet been soiled by the contact of society, she had seen no laughter in the natural world. Nature had only symbols for her of her nobler joys and nobler sorrows. She laboured, therefore, under the delusion that life was a solemn thing.

Mr. Herbert, when he heard her words, looked as if all was over. He sat resignedly silent, with the face of a man who had done his best to save society, and was sorry that it declined to be saved; and he washed his hands of his ward, so far as her practical life was concerned, and deter-

mined thenceforward to banish all sense of duty and look upon her simply as a work of art.

At this moment a man came laden with cigars and coffee, which helped to smooth an awkward moment or two, and gave Mr. Welstead (secretly rejoicing in Mr. Herbert's discomfiture) an opportunity to think of a speech. He thought he saw clearly that a high hand must be taken.

"My dear Miss de la Poele," he said, "we must really begin to talk a little seriously. All this kind of thing is twaddle; you must really be advised; old heads can't be expected on young shoulders, of course. No, no, we don't expect that; but you must remember your position. You are the last of an old stock; you are immensely wealthy; you have a large, a valuable property to control; you have responsibilities in this trying position which you must be freed from—responsibilities which no lady can be expected to bear—of whose nature and working you must be ignorant."

"I do not quite understand you," said Cynthia.

Mr. Welstead stared a little at this. A feeling passed over him that he might be treading upon delicate ground; but he looked at the innocent young face before him, and he felt reassured.

"Well, take for instance, my dear Miss de la Poele," he continued, affably stroking his chin, "take for instance the most important factor in the management of landed property—the question of rent. Now you can of course be expected to know nothing about this question: as a girl of twenty, why should you?—no girl of twenty does. What should you say, for instance, you, who talk of giving half your income to charities, if I were to ask you, What is rent? Why, you would remain dumb!"

"No," said Cynthia, quietly. "I should say that rent was the effect of a natural monopoly."

It was now Mr. Welstead's turn to remain dumb; and he did so with facial accompaniments; his mouth gaped, his eyes rolled, he was in extremities; but he saw Mr. Herbert smiling, and he determined that if he could escape by a quibble he would.

"That is not a very good definition of rent, is it?" he said, deprecatingly.

"Isn't it?" said Cynthia, in all innocence, and full of a desire to be informed. "Then do give me a better one."

But this Mr. Welstead did not exactly see his way to. He was a member of Parliament, and felt rightly that in that one name a knowledge of Political Economy was necessarily involved—to be expressed or not, as the fitness of things might determine.

"Rent is a difficult thing to define — except superficially," he said. In this he thought he was safe; but he erred also in this.

"Surely," said Cynthia, "every name can be defined whose meaning is capable of analysis!"

This reply was the Waterloo to Mr. Welstead's hopes. He felt himself degraded in the public

eye; that is, in those of his coadjutors. He remained dumb, sucking at an extinguished cigar, and cursing the higher education of women. He glared round for assistance from his comrades, but he looked seemingly for help when no help was near. Mr. Herbert was leaning back in his chair, looking at Miss de la Poele as if she was a picture and he was about to varnish her; and Mr. Oldmixon seemed wrapped in infantine slumbers, but smoking. This last sight irritated the head trustee beyond endurance.

"Well, Mr. Oldmixon," he said, sternly, "and what do you advise?"

The reply from this quarter came instantaneously in a quiet gurgle. "The up train is at five forty-five."

To Mr. Welstead these words formed a complete scheme of salvation.

"Well, my dear Miss de la Poele," he said, "time waits for nobody; and neither does the train—ha! ha! neither does the train; so we

must put off our small discussion on rent till next time we meet. There were several things I wanted to have talked about, but time has slipped away so pleasantly that they must wait till next time. There is one thing, however, that we must insist upon—we don't want to be hard—but we must insist upon it. We wish you to receive your neighbours when they call, and return their visits; and when you go these long rides you are so fond of, we wish you to be accompanied by your groom. It is right and proper. Accidents may always happen."

"I don't want to take my groom—please don't order me to. I am not afraid of accidents."

"But we are," said Mr. Welstead. "Your aunt has provided a decent, smart fellow, and I must beg that he accompanies you in future. Then no harm can come."

"We all beg," said Mr. Herbert, giving Cynthia a rose.

"Very well," said Cynthia, pouting, "I shall

obey; but I hate the idea—I don't know why, but I hate it."

"Pooh! fancy! my dear Miss de la Poele, fancy," said Mr. Welstead, drawing on his gloves. "It is simply a precaution that no harm may come. That is all."

They were in the hall by this time. Cynthia shook hands warmly with them all. In another hour the three were on their way back to London. They were relieved, but somehow they were silent. They had in truth enjoyed a completely new experience, and each man expressed his sense of this in his own way before they reached London.

"Heigho," sighed Mr. Herbert, throwing down the Pall Mall. "What a gorgeous creature! I feel

as a watcher of the skies
When some new planet swims into his ken."

"I never saw such a girl in my life," said Mr. Welstead. "What do you think, Oldmixon?"

"She has never seen a racehorse," said Mr. Oldmixon, laying down the Sporting Times. "She

is fond of horses. That is what she wants-make up a party for Goodwood and take her there."

"My dear Oldmixon, whatever we are, let us be reasonable," said Mr. Herbert.

"Well, I am glad this day is over," said Mr. Welstead, as they alighted at Waterloo. "Come," he continued, "we will sup together at the 'Megatherium,' and have a chat over it. I am glad at any rate that we were firm in the matter of the groom. We were right there, I think, eh?"

This question was agreed to nem. con., and after mutual congratulations and a heavy meal each man went his different way, and banished Cynthia from his thoughts.

"We will have the next meeting of trustees this day six weeks," Mr. Welstead had said at parting.

But meanwhile the drama to which their visit had been the prologue was developing at De la Poele Court.

Three weeks exactly from the date of the official visit, Cynthia, who had obeyed her guardians' instructions and ridden every day with James Smedley, the groom, came into the drawing-room of De la Poele Court in her riding habit, and told Aunt Ernestine that she was engaged to be married to him.

The first thing that Aunt Ernestine did on hearing this piece of news was to faint.

She then called upon some Anglican saints whom she had lately added to the calendar; sent for the doctor, the rector, and the policeman; despatched three telegrams one after the other to each of the guardians; discharged James Smedley, and then locked herself in her bed-room and read books.

When the gentlemen whose foresight had produced this strange fruit received the news of it, they realised the irony of things, and started for Blankshire by the morning train, with the faces of men who had sown figs and reaped thistles,

and would be glad to be informed how the miracle had been worked.

On their arrival at De la Poele Court they found the fair proprietress prepared to give them battle — they found her, in short, sitting in the library at her writing-table, waiting in her entrenchments, as it were, with Aunt Ernestine sitting before them repulsed and weeping.

Each lady's position was flanked with works, which were the artillery of this siege; Aunt Ernestine's batteries being composed principally of small books with red leaves, while her opponent's armament seemed of a heavier and deadlier type.

Having combined their forces with Aunt Ernestine's, the guardians assailed their ward's position without delay. But they had miscalculated its strength. They had underrated, too, the abilities of its defender; and, before they had been at work five minutes, the surface of Cynthia's writing-table was, as it were, a glacis

of the Redan, on which many of their best arguments lay sprawling.

The air was filled with the clamour of combatants; frenzied appeals on behalf of the duty due to family were met by quotations from the works of miscreants to whom family is as nothing; the sacred authority of the Church was upheld with a fervour that seemed inspired from above, and was called in question by arguments drawn seemingly from another place; and above all the rush and din of words Mr. Herbert's silver tones were distinctly audible, entreating everybody to be reasonable.

But this is exactly what Cynthia did not seem disposed to be; that is, according to her guardians' view of the matter. When they talked about the scandal, she asked them, "What was public opinion to her?" When they spoke of the groom's low origin, she said, that "be his birth what it might, he had a more thoroughbred nose and mouth than any man in Blank-

shire;" and when they entreated her to think of her own high race, and to consider his low one, she talked about village Hampdens, and quoted the "Elegy in a Country Churchyard."

"This," gasped Aunt Ernestine, during a pause in which each side were, as it were, burying their dead, "this—this—" she said, "is not surprising conduct from a girl who has grown up under other influences than those of the Anglican Church."

"The Church, at least, should be no respecter of persons," said Cynthia, replying to this fire.

"The true Church," said Aunt Ernestine, with an upward glance, which recalled St. Cecilia seated at the organ, "the true Church," she said, "has always been aristocratic in her care for Class."

"That," said Cynthia, "is because she has fallen from her ideal."

"The ideal at which she aims, child, has never changed," cried Aunt Ernestine.

"No," said Cynthia, "it is the aims that have become corrupt."

This was a shot which dismounted Aunt Ernestine's gun.

"We had better send for the Rector," she said, as if this was a case beyond earthly cure.

"Come, come, let us be reasonable," said Mr. Herbert.

"Reasonable!" cried Mr. Welstead. "There is little reason in the matter, I should fancy. My dear Miss de la Poele," he said, turning towards her with an air of stolid entreaty, "now do think of every sacred duty; do think; do be regulated in this matter by some care for decency, for convention, for your position, for all those inexpressibly sacred associations which are joined in your ancestors' history with a life-long fidelity to Conservative principles and a faith in what is—what is right."

"I shall," said Cynthia, simply. "I shall marry James Smedley."

"My very dear Miss de la Poele," said Mr. Herbert, "why should you do a thing so entirely unreasonable?"

"Because I love him," said Cynthia. She rose from her seat as she said it, and the crimson flush which spread over neck and cheek confessed the goddess. But it was another goddess this time than the one who inspired the glance which the three men of the world had on their last visit found so intolerable. It was the glance of Artemis no more; or if it was, it was the glance of Artemis after she had met Endymion; and though Cynthia's eye was full of fire, it was a fire with which these men of the world were familiar, and which they met without flinching.

With the wood-nymph's first contact with the world, indeed some virtue had gone out of her; and she was conscious of the change. She dropped her eyes before Mr. Herbert's steady gaze, and left the room without another word.

Silence prevailed for a minute or two, and

then the irritation and perplexity which struggled for mastery in Mr. Welstead's bosom found sudden vent.

"Tut! tut!" he began, irritably, "and what is to be done now?"

The answer to this came from Mr. Oldmixon, who had up to the moment preserved a watchful silence.

"We had better see the groom, I think," he said.

"A capital idea," said Mr. Herbert; "let us hope that the groom will be reasonable."

"I daresay we shall find means to make him so. And we had better interview him in the stables, I think," said Mr. Oldmixon, gravely leading the way. He wanted to go somewhere where he could smoke, that was the truth.

Though James Smedley had been discharged from the stable on the previous afternoon by Miss Ernestine, yet the guardians found him grooming Cynthia's favourite horse when they

got there. In fact, he had refused to go at anybody's bidding but his mistress's, as he called Cynthia, and she had not told him to.

He looked up when the three gentlemen entered the stable, and they saw at a glance that, as far as looks were concerned, Cynthia had done her lover no more than justice. He was in truth as handsome and gentlemanly a looking fellow as you would find in a day's march, and he met the six hostile eyes with a smile and without flinching.

"Are you James Smedley?" said Mr. Welstead, with a frown that would have done credit to an inquisitor.

"Yes."

"And how dare you," began Mr. Welstead, foaming over at once like a champagne bottle with the cork drawn, "how dare you——"

But the groom arrested his eloquence in mid course.

"Have the kindness to remember that you

are speaking to a gentleman," he said, "or I shall have to correct you with this hay-rake."

Mr. Welstead stared aghast; but there was a decision in James Smedley's voice, and there was that in his eye which betrayed the boxer. The member of Parliament drew back therefore a little space, and began a more distant parley from behind a straw heap.

"I repeat-" he said.

"You had better repeat nothing," Smedley broke in, "understand me clearly. I know who you are, and I know the position of affairs. The young lady whom the accident of fortune made my mistress has destined me for a higher honour, and one which I am proud to accept. I am groom now; next year I shall be master! Put that in your pipe and smoke it."

But this was a brand of tobacco with whose flavour Mr. Welstead was completely unfamiliar. He had expected effrontery; but not such an unvarnished tale as this. He looked at Smedley

for a moment as if he should like to strike him, and then he thought better of it, and looked at Mr. Herbert. "I hardly know whether we hadn't better send for an officer," he said. "The fellow seems inclined for violence." As he said it he got between Mr. Herbert and the stable door.

"Come, come," said Mr. Herbert, suavely, "do let us be reasonable. How much will you take to clear out of this, and never come near Miss de la Poele again?"!

"Fifteen thousand pounds a year," said Smedley, with the leer of Apollyon.

The guardians, upon receipt of this advance towards settling the difficulty, retired into an adjacent loose-box, and consulted together with some earnestness and heat; when they at length emerged into the light of day, Mr. Welstead took up a position from which flight into an outhouse was easily secured to him, and announced the result of their deliberation.

"James Smedley," he said, "you are evidently

an impostor, and we suspect you of being something worse. We have, however, no wish to open up your past if you will leave the neighbourhood at once, and indulge henceforth in no kind of communication with Miss de la Poele. If you will sign an agreement to this effect we will give you three hundred pounds, and pay your passage to some foreign country. Do you accept these conditions?"

"You are a cruel jester," said Smedley, with fine sarcasm.

"Be reasonable — be reasonable," said Mr. Herbert.

"I will," said Smedley.

"If you are not out of this place in an hour," said Mr. Welstead, "you will be given in charge. As you have declined our terms, I give you warning that we shall institute the strictest inquiries into your past. Should you make any further attempt to intrude yourself upon Miss de la Poele, it will be the worse for you."

"Allow me to show you the door," said Smedley.

This looked like defeat for the guardians; but as they were going out Mr. Oldmixon, who had watched the groom's face during the whole interview with the pertinacity of a lynx, seemed suddenly struck by a recollection.

"Go on," he said to Messrs. Herbert and Welstead, "I will follow you in a minute." Then he turned and said quietly to Smedley: "Come now, here is twenty pounds for you. Now clear out."

The other looked upon him from head to foot incredulously.

"Who are you?" he said.

"Never mind that," said Mr. Oldmixon, "I have seen you before."

"Indeed," said Smedley. "I have my doubts of that."

"Let me dispel them, then," said Mr. Old-mixon, "by this slight biographical sketch: Your

real name is John Williams; you began life by being drummed out of the 150th Regiment for drawing your sword on your superior officer; you then became a turf agent under the guise of a large black beard and moustache and the name of Macdonald, and in that stage of your life I had some transactions with you. Shall I go on? The firm under whose name you traded appeared one day in the dock at the Old Bailey, for some rather ingenious turf frauds. You were present to see your accomplices get their fourteen years. Your disguise cloaked you on that occasion from the keenest professional eyes; it has not disguised you from mine. Now are your doubts at rest?"

The light which gleamed in Smedley's eyes during this speech would have made a less timorous man than Mr. Oldmixon pause in his recital. His glances had all the savagery in them of a wild beast, and when Mr. Oldmixon had done, the groom drew back suddenly with the gesture of a lion about to spring upon his prey.

His adversary, however, somewhat ostentatiously produced a knuckle-duster from his pocket, and this made him pause.

"Who the devil are you?" he said hoarsely.

"That is what many people would like to know," said Mr. Oldmixon quietly. "Now, come, let us get this business over and have done with it. Does Miss de la Poele know your handwriting?"

"She ought to."

"Write this, then," said Mr. Oldmixon, leading the way into the harness-room. Arrived here, the man of mystery drew out a pencil and tore a leaf from a pocket-book. He set it before Smedley. "Write," he said, dictating:

"'This is to say that I, up to now known as James Smedley, and acting as groom to Miss de la Poele, am in reality a felon flying from justice. My real name is John Williams, and I write this as a guarantee that I am allowed to

leave the country free, abandoning at the same time all pretension to the hand of the mistress from whom I have received nothing but kindness, which I have so grossly repaid.

"'(Signed)

"' JOHN WILLIAMS (alias James Smedley)."

"Now go," said Mr. Oldmixon, "and sail in the Alaska from Liverpool to-morrow. An agent of mine will see that you do; and if you take my advice you will find employment and congenial comrades on the frontiers of Mexico. "Good-day." Here he handed over forty pounds and Smedley, alias Williams, left without a word.

In half an hour Mr. Oldmixon returned to the house, sauntering and gently rubbing his hands; he had seen Smedley well on his way to the station, escorted by a common friend, and there was no doubt in his mind that he would catch the five forty-five up to town. He found his co-trustees in the drawing-room being entertained by Aunt Ernestine with a prolonged recital of Cynthia's peccadilloes, to an accompaniment of tears, and extracts quoted at random from "The Anglican the only True Church."

"Ah!" cried Mr. Herbert, who had but a feeble digestion for ecclesiastical truths, starting up. "My dear Mr. Oldmixon, what have you been doing?" he continued, less from an anxiety to be informed than from a wish to arrest the stream of Aunt Ernestine's eloquence. "What in the world have you been doing?"

"I have been doing a little business on my own account," said Mr. Oldmixon, quietly; and he continued, addressing Aunt Ernestine, "I should like, if it is convenient, to say a few words to Miss de la Poele."

At this everybody stared. Up to this point Mr. Oldmixon's exercise of his trusteeship had been confined to guttural gurgles and an occasional reminder that the up-train was at five forty-five. Beyond this as an active agent he was looked

upon as simply less than nothing. In Mr. Welstead's opinion, his position in the scale of utility wavered between a walking Bradshaw and an irresponsible chorus, who gave weight to the opinions of men capable of judging by simply adding his voice to theirs. He was a reliable echo, and no more. He now gave this sentiment form.

"Pooh! Oldmixon," he said, with a fatuous smile, "leave the girl alone. What good will come of worrying her? Let her alone. She will be wiser to-morrow."

"She will," said Mr. Oldmixon, with a meaning smile, "when I have said a few words to her. May I ask you," he continued, turning to Aunt Ernestine, "to convey my respects to your niece, and tell her that I particularly request the favour of a moment's conversation?"

Miss Ernestine de la Poele left the room. Mr. Welstead stared and said nothing. Mr. Herbert drained his tea-cup and whistled a fragment from the overture to *Tannhäuser*. This was a prelude

to the finale of this small domestic drama, and Mr. Oldmixon walked up and down the room, holding its *dénouement* in his hand.

In a moment or two Cynthia entered the room with her aunt. It seemed as though she had a sense that some evil was impending, for she was deadly pale, and her lips were white, too, and compressed tightly.

She came quickly up from the door, the whole length of the room to where Mr. Oldmixon was standing on the hearth-rug, trifling with the thing that was to destroy her, and looked him steadily in the face.

"You sent for me," she said.

Mr. Oldmixon seemed for a moment irresolute; he toyed with the fatal paper for a moment nervously. Mr. Welstead and Mr. Herbert drew nearer to him; it seemed to them too, at last, that something was in the wind.

"You sent for me," said Cynthia again.
Suddenly she perceived the man's irresolution.

Her fine perception caught instant alarm. The passions she had inherited from her mother, which had lain silent but growing through the lapse of an ideal life, burst into a sudden flame. The veins in her temple swelled, her eyes darted flames; she was like a pythoness inspired. She rushed with such violence upon the man whom she suspected, that he staggered as if he had been struck by a flash of lightning.

"What have you done to him?" she cried hoarsely.

The two others made a movement to come to the rescue of their companion, thinking that the girl was out of her mind; but it was only a movement. She waved them back, and there was such a fatal energy in the gesture that they obeyed it mechanically.

"Tell me what you have done to him," she said again.

[&]quot;I have done nothing to him."

[&]quot;It is a lie! I see that you have in your face.

Tell me where he is. Tell me at once, I say!"
Her voice rose like a trumpet. "I will go to him.
Stand back! No one had better prevent me!"

She turned to go. Mr. Oldmixon then stopped her with a gesture.

"He has left you," he said, handing her the letter.

On hearing these words, Cynthia de la Poele uttered a cry which made the room ring again, and every person's blood in it run cold. It was the cry of a lioness robbed of her young; and when it passed, the trembling with which she was seized in every limb, made the very ornaments in the room rattle.

Then she read the fatal letter through as if she but half gathered its meaning. But when the reality of the thing dawned upon her, which it did when she had read it half through aloud for the second time, she crumpled the thing in her hands as if she would have ground it to powder, and dropped as though she had been stabbed to the

heart. Restoratives were applied, she was taken upstairs, and laid upon a sofa. The dressing-bell now rang for dinner, and the guardians separated without another word. The last thing they expected or wished to see again that evening was their ward. To their infinite surprise, however, she appeared when the dinner-bell rang, dressed in black, pale, but self-possessed. She made no reference to what had occurred, but sat at the head of her table with touching tact and grace. It was not till bed-time arrived that she expressed a wish to leave De la Poele Court without delay.

"I should like to see the world," she said, "and go into society. May I go up to town with you to-morrow?"

This was considered by the three Wise Men of Gotham an extremely desirable inclination, and one to be at once gratified. A palace was taken; Aunt Ernestine, who had a keen palate for social life, notwithstanding her feeling for the Church, was installed as chaperon, and Cynthia de la Poe'e

was initiated under the happiest auspices into the mysterious pleasures of fashionable life.

For a while all seemed to be going well. The girl was courted for her name no less than for her wealth and beauty; many adorers sighed; it was thought that a cure had been found for the cancer of a violent disillusionment, and that in the whirl of fashion and frivolity Cynthia de la Poele had learned to forget. But these hopes were destined soon to be destroyed. The fascinations of the world soon palled on a spirit touched to finer issues. Before the end of her first season the heiress met the famous Monseigneur Savranelle, a man who united a handsome presence and a charming urbanity to a tact which was formed to triumph over scruples, and which had drawn many of the world's envied ones into the Communion of Rome.

He found Cynthia with her mind unsatisfied, with her imagination athirst for an ideal. He found her, moreover, informed with a rooted contempt for the hollowness and insincerity of social forms. His work was easy. A few arguments only were found necessary to wean a mind that was a poet's from the sophistries of the Utilitarians; a little eloquence was sufficient to divert the fervour of that mind into a different channel; and at the end of the season an ideal and sensitive nature, greatly dowered for evil or for good, which had suffered, as such natures alone can, from a sudden contact with the malice and the treachery of a corrupt society, found a haven (as others of a like mould have found, and will find it) in the great Communion of Rome!

There was a great stir at this catastrophe in the fashionable world. Remonstrances were addressed in no measured words to Monseigneur Savranelle himself—and from high places.

The polished prelate, however, only curled a contumelious lip, and treated the expostulations of society with the tolerant smile of a man who knew well what they were worth.

"Let her alone," he said, shaking his head gravely. "Let her alone. She is at peace now. All is for the best."

This is possible.

The greater part of Cynthia de la Poele's vast possessions passed with her to the Church.

THE PARSON.



THE PARSON.

THE village of Masham lies in a narrow ravine, hemmed in by high heather hills. From the north end of the valley a brown and noisy trout stream rushes down from the sombre moorlands which form the water-shed of the county, brawls noisily at the back of thatched and whitewashed cottages, flows quietly over deep pools at the bottom of the Vicarage garden, and then debouches into a lonely waste of sand dunes, through which it wanders lazily to the sea.

In days when the labourers' lot is often a dreary record of unproductive toil, none of the agricultural curses of the times had reached so far as Masham. An air of peaceful prosperity pervaded the place. The fortunes of the dwellers in this happy valley seemed

to have caught colour from the pleasantness of their surroundings. As a mass they were a staid, sober, industrious set of people, and in their clean, comfortable cottages, set in gardens of old-fashioned flowers, they were housed as quiet, sobriety, and industry deserve to be.

These blessings, however, strange though it may seem, the inhabitants of Masham owed to none of the fashionable economic theories of the day. They knew nothing of the mild independent delights of a peasant proprietorship, and the voice of Mr. Henry George, proclaiming the sacred right of every man born of woman to grab a piece of land from his neighbour, had not stirred the depths of their tranquil but benighted Eden. Their ignorance indeed, with regard to the most burning social questions of the day, would have made some of our more modern prophets stare.

Five miles from the last station of an uncompleted line, and separated from the metropolis by a seven hours' railway journey, the village of Masham was practically out of the world; and, confounding though it may appear, its prosperity had grown and flourished under a condition of affairs which, as nearly as in the nineteenth century is possible, resembled the feudal tenure.

The parson of the parish was the lord of the manor. The Reverend Immanuel Vansittart was the last of an old family who had been born, had grown gray, and had died in the Elizabethan Vicarage under the hill, and he ruled with an absolute but temperate sway. King in the completest sense, trustee of the souls as well as the bodies of his flock, he felt the sacred nature of his responsibility, and played no fantastic tricks before high heaven. He insisted on order and decency, but in an age of affectation he did not pretend to philosophy, or to the possession of a greater soul than his neighbours; and, as a consequence, the standard of morality which he set up, though strict, was homely. A manly, cheerful moderation was his ideal, and by this feeling the laws which

governed his small kingdom were inspired. He was actively an advocate for temperance, and, after a due exercise of clemency, drunkenness at Masham was punished by exile. But the Vicar perceived nothing commendable in total abstinence, and, instead of setting up a coffee-tavern in the village, he took care that the drink sold at the public-house should be sound and wholesome. But though, in his firm insistance on principles really temperate, Mr. Vansittart did not go to the lengths of the wholesale condemners of alcohol, yet in another direction he struck more profoundly at the root of the whole issue; he touched one side of a truth that is much lost sight of; he impressed upon his parishioners that intemperance does not simply mean drinking too much; and he assured them, as an example of this dictum, that there was nothing commendable in a labourer of eighteen marrying on fourteen shillings a week, and having seven children by the time he was twenty-five.

Influenced by these and similar wise yet genial counsels, Mr. Vansittart's subjects enjoyed the blessings of moderate labour and unstraitened means; and they regarded the benefactor who had assisted them to these joys with reverent yet affectionate eyes. They took more than a friendly interest in him and his surroundings, showed the utmost concern at any rumour of indisposition at the Rectory, and considered the Rector himself as the perfect model of what a Christian minister should be.

But in this their criticism was partial. Though as a landlord Mr. Vansittart was in advance perhaps of his age, as a rector he was forty years behind it. He was indeed, to a degree now rarely seen, a sporting parson of the old school, and he conducted the service of his church as his kind were used to conduct it. He was earnest and reverend enough in himself, but he forgot to make a parade of either virtue, and he had no sense of the value of forms. He put his surplice

on in the reading-desk because the vestry was used as a tool-house, never preached a sermon in the afternoon, and never dreamed of such a thing as a service on a Saint's day. Sunday was, in brief, the only day in which he assumed the Parson; during the rest of the week he was a hunting, hawking, fishing, country squire.

In all these sports he excelled. He hunted a pack of beagles which were known for miles round for the evenness of their shape, and for the patient skill with which they were handled; he threw a better line than anybody in Blankshire, and knew twice as much of the haunts and habits of fish, and he was one of the last of the old English country gentlemen who made hawking a regular pastime.

While the parson was thus occupied it may be supposed that the parish was neglected; but of parish work, in the modernly received meaning of the term, Mr. Vansittart had no conception, nor, had he understood what the employ-

ment meant, would he have shown either liking or capacity for it. From his point of view, a methodical round of unsolicited visits would have been an impertinence offered to his parishioners. If any of them wished to see him officially they sent for him, and he never even entered a cottage to pay an ordinary visit unless he was asked in. In his eyes an Englishman's home, however humble, was his castle, provided he paid his rent, and he would no more have thought of walking into Mrs. Hodge's parlour without first asking if she wished to see him, than he would have thought of walking into the drawing-room of the Sinberts, the De la Poeles, or any other county family, without asking whether the mistress of the house was at home.

The singularity of these views might not, under ordinary conditions, have escaped scandal or even censure, but for forty years three causes had cloaked Mr. Vansittart's vagaries from a prying world—his parishioners were content, his parish

was remote, and the bishop of the diocese was old-fashioned, tolerant, and preternaturally inclined for peace.

The Rector of Masham looked forward therefore to ending his life as he had lived it, in the tranquil performance of his simple round of pleasures and duties, and in the fond company of his second daughter. Susan Vansittart's elder sister, Agatha, had been long since married to a Mr. Telford, who held a good post in the Indian Civil Service, and the mother of the two girls had been dead for fifteen years. Mr. Vansittart, who had never ceased to pine in secret for the loss of his wife, looked upon death with almost a childish simplicity, as but a certain means to reunion with her. He awaited the inevitable end with a calm content; no failure of hope tinged the evening of his life with a browner shade.

But a Nemesis dogs the heels of the man having authority who lives behind his age. At the very moment when Mr. Vansittart was savouring the calm which should close in the battle of life, the sunshine of his existence became shadowed.

Shortly after the Higginbottoms had seceded from their ruthless occupation of the Grange, the Vicar of the adjoining parish of Startleigh—a man after Mr. Vansittart's own heart—died suddenly, full of years and debts, and regretted by the whole country-side. He was succeeded by a very different class of man.

The Reverend Ambrose Aguire was a High Churchman of rigidly extreme views, and of a large independent fortune, which he used to forward them. He was clean-shaven, aquiline-featured, handsome, cultured. Fresh from the headship of an Oxford College, he possessed a manner full of a grave academic suavity, under which a zealot's temper lay concealed. The current of his life ran in a strictly narrow channel to a strictly defined goal, and he secretly

thought nothing of the future chances of any of his neighbours whose ends were not similarly ordered. Being, however, a believer in the talismanic value of forms, socially he was tolerant. In the face of heresy he smiled faintly, and seemed at any rate

> Disposed to give a hearing to the lost, And breakfast with them ere they went below.

This gentleman, in the ordinary course of events, rode over to call at Masham. Mr. Vansittart, with all the blindness of fatuity, took a fancy to him. He received him with an old-fashioned hospitality, insisted that he should stay to luncheon, and uncorked a classic wine. During the meal, which was a sumptuous one, Mr. Aguire exerted himself conversationally to the utmost, that is to say, whenever he could slip a word in edgeways. He was witty, bright, interested in the biography of his predecessor at Startleigh, and goodhumouredly tolerant of the chaotic state in which the deceased had left his parish. Mr. Vansittart

was completely charmed, and as a proof of it, immediately after luncheon was over, guided his guest to the beagles, the falcons, and the site of the new establishment for breeding trout.

Mr. Aguire considered these various sights with an amused interest, though personally he had no feeling for sport. Mr. Vansittart, however, thought none the worse of him for this, since he seemed so willing to be informed.

"You must come and see the beagles at work," he said, slamming the kennel door.

"Will you," said Mr. Aguire, "extend your hospitality further to me, and show me your church?"

Mr. Vansittart consented boisterously, but not without some inward promptings that this sight should not have been reserved till last. However, he led his guest through the churchyard with an elastic step, confident that no disappointment was in store for him. The church was a pure sample of the Decorated style, and had been beautifully restored but three years before at the Rector's own expense.

Mr. Aguire was completely charmed by it.

"This is most refreshing," he began, glancing about him with a quiet ecstasy. "I wish that we were as well off—or half as well off—at Startleigh as you are here. But my predecessor in office appears to have occupied himself so strenuously with his parish that he completely neglected the state of his church."

There was just a faint tinge of sarcasm in Mr. Aguire's voice as he said this. It did not escape Mr. Vansittart's notice.

"Ah!" he said, thinking kindly of his dead friend, "Bowdler was a dear, good, kind soul, if there ever was one, but he had a large family, and some of them made heavy calls upon him."

Mr. Aguire bowed sympathetically.

"An organ I see," he cried. "And a fine one too!

Do you have a surpliced choir?"

Mr. Vansittart started.

"A surpliced choir!" he exclaimed. "God bless my soul, no!"

"Where is your vestry?" asked Mr. Aguire, not seeming to notice the ingenuous surprise expressed in his host's tones.

"The vestry!" replied Mr. Vansittart, who had now recovered himself; "the vestry," he said confidentially, "we use as a tool-house. I robe in the lectern."

The new Rector of Startleigh seemed to feel the air in the church chill. He shuddered slightly. "Well," he said, looking at his watch, "I am extremely obliged to you, Mr. Vansittart, for your hospitality, but I was warned what to expect from the clergy in these parts." Here he looked at the lectern.

Mr. Vansittart intercepted this glance. For a moment a suspicion startled him that the allusion which had preceded it had a double meaning. But his open nature banished this reasonable fancy.

"You must not hurry away before tea," he said, leading the way back to the Vicarage, "or before you have heard my girl Susan sing either."

Mr. Aguire said that he would be charmed to stay

a little longer, and he had no reason to regret this decision. He was a cultivated musician himself, and Susan Vansittart had a magnificent contralto voice. To add to this charm, she seemed to have been gifted with a delicate sense of Mr. Aguire's taste in music, and she sang an "Ave Maria" of Mercadante's, with a depth of feeling which surprised even her father. Mr. Aguire himself was visibly affected. For a moment his enthusiastic temperament showed itself through the veil of an habitual reserve.

"You sang that divinely," he cried, "and you have a glorious voice!"

"Sing 'The Last Rose of Summer,' lass," said Mr. Vansittart, who had little palate for classic song.

Again Mr. Aguire seemed chilled. His circulation, however, was soon restored when Susan Vansittart, paying no heed to her father's request, sang another fine fragment of the ornate church music of Italy. When she had finished, Mr. Aguire was once more enthusiastic in his applause, and he accompanied his compliments to the voice with a look

of grave tenderness directed to the singer. Susan Aguire, who was blonde almost to a fault, with pale green eyes, good features, and eyelashes and eyebrows so light as to be almost imperceptible, glowed under Mr. Aguire's glance a most celestial red. After an awkward pause she rose from the piano suddenly and left the room.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Mr. Vansittart, "my girl is not used to compliments. She is a shy country chit, and I see your congratulations have put her out of countenance. I'll wager now you won't see her any more to-day."

At this Mr. Aguire expressed a somewhat impetuous regret. On going out into the hall, however, a minute or two afterwards, he found Miss Vansittart bending over some flowers, and prepared to bid him good-bye.

"I hope," he began, taking her hand with an elaborate courteousness that approached to gallantry, "I hope," he said, " as soon as I have got things into some sort of order at Startleigh, that you and

your father——" Here he smiled at Mr. Vansittart, who issued at the moment from the library armed with a large box of cigars. "I was hoping, Mr. Vansittart," he said, "that you and your daughter will do me the pleasure of lunching with me as soon as I can get the Rectory at Startleigh into some sort of order. No, I thank you, I am not a smoker. After luncheon," he continued, turning once more to Susan, "you will, I hope, be generous, and let me hear that fine voice once more! I am a musician in a feeble fashion myself, but I think I could do justice to the magnificent accompaniment of that 'Ave Maria' on my violin."

He shook hands warmly with Miss Vansittart and left the house with her father, who was anxious to see his new neighbour's horse. Arrived at the stables, where Mr. Aguire preferred for modest reasons to mount, a very handsome cob was led out into the yard. On the varied excellence of its points Mr. Vansittart discoursed with unfeigned and learned delight, giving its owner, who showed himself no expert at mounting, a leg up at the same time.

"This is one of the tidiest bits of horseflesh that I have seen for a six-month," he said.

Mr. Aguire, who was at last fixed in his saddle, smiled rather coldly. Then he bent down and said: "That is a beautiful church of yours, but it has no stained glass in it. I should like to make you a present of an east window."

Mr. Vansittart came back to the Rectory in a divided mood. In the drawing-room he found his daughter, who seemed unable to say enough in favour of the departed visitor. When she was told of his parting offer she expressed unbounded admiration at its lavish generosity, and declared that a stained glass window was exactly the thing that she had long secretly pined for. Her father looked surprised at this enthusiasm, and he felt hurt as well. He did not hold with stained glass windows himself, alleging that they made a church look gloomy; nor was he altogether sure that Mr. Aguire's proposal was in the best of taste. A present so suddenly offered seemed almost a reproach. At first he thought of writing a

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civil note to decline the gift; then he thought this would be discourteous, and wrote and accepted it.

This proved his first step on the steep way to destruction. Events followed fast on one another's heels. Within two months a stained glass window, representing Abraham offering up Isaac, was erected in the east end of Masham Church, and Mr. Aguire was engaged to be married to the Rector's daughter. About the same time Mr. Vansittart began to feel the first approaches of old age in a lethargy which occasionally beset him; and he became aware, at the same time, of a slight change which had come over the spirit of his household.

His daughter Susan began to busy herself in the parish. She was always in and out of the cottages; she set up a night school, instituted a mothers' meeting, and declined, on the ground of exhaustion, to accompany her father hare-hunting.

Unskilled in the diagnosis of the disease, Mr. Vansittart underrated the import of these symptoms; he thought—good, easy man—that his daughter

was simply unsettled by her engagement, and that marriage would soon allay this temporary excess of zeal. Meanwhile he pressed forward the arrangements for the wedding, and wondered whence Susan—whose disposition was by nature as colourless as her hair—had acquired her sudden vehemence of speech and action. The bare fact of the existence of such a doubt revealed Mr. Vansittart's complete ignorance of the true disposition of his son-in-law.

Uninfluenced by a stronger mind, Susan Vansittart was too indolent to think deeply on any subject, but she had entertained a violent passion for Mr. Aguire for several weeks before he had proposed to her, and this bent had concentrated her scattered sympathies slowly and surely towards Ritualism. Through the influences of a new emotion, Mr. Aguire seemed to her eyes transfigured; he loomed preternaturally large and grand; he seemed less a cultured High Churchman than some saint of the old Church re-risen. a learned, polished, courtly ascetic, a man to be looked upon with idolatry rather than with love, a

man to whom it was a privilege and an honour to be utterly and reverently subservient.

At first this enthusiasm spent its sole force on the object which had given it being; but presently it acquired a reflex action. For several weeks before her marriage with the man she adored, Susan Vansittart had discovered that her father was wanting in Spiritual grace. Dazed with the halo of spiritual romance with which she had crowned the pensive brow of the Vicar of Startleigh, she was unable to discover in the Rector of Masham any qualification for his calling. He was a good, kind, tender-hearted, considerate father enough, but it was painful to see him in a pulpit.

Susan Vansittart's feelings had reached this ominous stage of development when, as Mrs. Aguire, she left Masham with her husband for her honeymoon. As yet she felt a vague spiritual uneasiness about her father, and nothing more; but vague fancies pass into fixed beliefs by a gradual but unceasing development. Mrs. Aguire soon found that

the grave convictions to which her filial fears were forcing her had been secretly instilled into her by another's iron will, by an enthusiasm far keener than her own. The truth, big with future issues, was broken to her in a most casual way.

"My dear," said her husband to her one afternoon as they were returning to the hotel at Beddgelert after a visit to Gelert's grave; "my dear," he said, breaking a silence which had fallen on them for some while, "I want you when you get home to try and influence your father to take-ahem-certain new departures, let us call them, in the manner in which he conducts the duties of his parish and the service of his church—ahem! At this present moment there is (I have said nothing of this to you before for purely selfish reasons I fear, connected with my own great happiness)-but there is much scandal which of course your father cannot possibly be aware of, growing round his administration of his office. As his sonin-law (to put the matter in its lowest and most selfish light), some side shafts of this perfectly natural discontent have lighted on me; but you know me, I hope, too well, to suppose for an instant that sordid personal considerations of that kind would urge me to move a step in the matter! No! I speak, Susan, because it is what I cannot but recognise as the prompting of the plainest and highest duty which compels me to suggest to your consideration the course—ahem—which I have suggested."

Mr. Aguire possessed, in company with Tiberius, James I., Metternich, Gortchakoff, and Mr. Gladstone, the capacity for obscuring a very simple issue in a dense cloud of pointless verbiage. There are moments in the lives of individuals, as well as in the lives of states, when it is better that our friends should have to quarry at our meaning, than that they should have it thrust upon them. Susan Aguire, however, though her husband's rhetoric had confused her, found no great difficulty in taking the kernel from his speech. She came to the point with a naïve bluntness.

"I suppose you would like papa to give up his

beagles," she said, cutting off the heads of some flowers with her umbrella.

Mr. Aguire smiled deprecatingly.

"Well! that," he began, "would, I think, be a rather strong demand to begin with." Then he drew his bride's arm under his own caressingly. "We will talk more of this matter by-and-by," he said with a sigh. "Meanwhile, look with what bright distinctness the light falls on that ash-tree! Ah! I have not been in Beddgelert since I left Oxford, though before that time I was a constant visitor; nor, as is indeed natural, have I ever seen my favourite haunt in Wales showing to such advantage."

Here he beamed upon his bride and led her back to the hotel. Susan Aguire felt filled with a new life; she considered that she had been called—called to the performance of a painful duty, but to the performance of a duty which was as clear as the light at noonday. With a kind of shamefaced regret she looked back over what now for the first time seemed to her the hours of a misspent past, a past unstirred

by high aspiration, careless of vital duties. How had she been able to tolerate her father's lax attitude to the Church! How had it been possible for her to wink at the robing in the lectern, at the vestry turned into the tool-house, at the beagles exercised after afternoon service, at all the other terrible, almost nameless irreverences!

But now all this was to be changed. Her husband had indeed opened her eyes; and if she in the past had sinned in the toleration of abuses, in the future she would at least seek to repair her fault by speaking her mind freely. She sickened of the beauties of mountain scenery and pined to enter upon duty's plain but thorny path.

"Let us go back to Startleigh, Ambrose," she said.

Mr. Aguire consented good-humouredly. He saw that his words had taken root, he was pleased to see a bride so readily influenced to earnestness, and he was no ecclesiastical Talleyrand to cry to a young aspirant, "Surtout, point de zèle." On the contrary,

he thought that no action directed against religious abuses could be too precipitate. He was an upright, earnest, conscientious man himself, he had suffered at periods in his life for his opinions, and he had endured to the end in his struggle after what he felt should be the Churchman's ideal. It is no matter for wonder therefore that he hailed with thankful satisfaction the birth of similar feelings in the mind of his newly married wife.

Mr. and Mrs. Aguire brought their honeymoon to a precipitate termination. The Rector of Startleigh felt like some second Peter the Hermit. He had stirred apathy to a moral crusade; he was an upright man, confident of the justice of the cause.

But many a wretch has ridden on a hurdle for less cruelties than have been committed by the confidently upright man. When a man is rumoured to be above his fellows in the rigidly high standard of principle which governs his life, his fellows should be on their guard. Let them listen as much as it pleases them, but let them not fall into that upright man's net.

For when a man forgets that, be he as wise and as upright as he will, he is still a man-than what is there more frail, more a mere nothing—and aims at a higher standard than his neighbours, whether that standard be the Immensities or the Eternities, or the greatest happiness of the greatest number, or the Reform of the Anglican Church, he comes to bring not peace but a sword. An innate sense of his own worthiness, however jesuitically he may attempt to disguise it, makes him incapable of pity. He will wade through a moral slaughter to his throne, or rather to his hobby, and will never perceive that he has killed any one when he has got there. He is like a speculator who will be a millionaire or nothing. He is the president of a moral auto-da-fé, and martyrs careless Gallios for the glory of his God.

Mr. Vansittart was about to savour this dire experience. He had come in satisfied but rather fagged, after a fast forty-five minutes on the moorlands with his beagles, when he found a letter awaiting

him. It bore the Bombay post-mark, and was from his eldest daughter, Mrs. Telford.

"My dear Papa"—thus it ran—"Archibald has been of late so extremely poorly with his liver that I have determined that he shall try what a sea voyage and a short stay in England will do for him. We shall be with you, therefore, at Masham, it may be before this letter reaches you. How glad I shall be to see the dear old home again; and you too, my ever dearest father, you cannot think how constantly you are in my thoughts. Yesterday, in the cathedral, your favourite hymn, 'Abide with me,' recalled you to me so vividly. We have now a very fair choir, and an anthem twice every Sunday. I so enjoy myself in the cathedral. There, at all events, is peace which never faileth. Archibald does pain me so, my dear father, by his indifference to the consolations of a religious service. He is so dear a husband, so upright, true, honourable, that I would give all I know to be able to wean him from his indifference. We sail in the *Deccan* to-morrow week, and, as this goes in a slower steamer, may be home ourselves before this warning of our approach reaches you.

"I had a letter from Susan last mail. She tells me that Startleigh has got a charming vicar in Mr. Aguire. I know his name perfectly. In fact I have a small manual of his, 'Firm Thoughts for Flying Moments,' in which some vital Church principles are most beautifully put. Susan tells me that he has most generously offered to put a stained glass window in the east end of the church. How beautiful it must look! I do so long to see it.

"Archibald sends his love.

"Ever your loving daughter,
"AGATHA TELFORD."

Mr. Vansittart, rejoiced at the prospect of seeing the daughter from whom he had been separated for seven years, gave immediate orders for unbounded preparation. The unexpected news acted on the Vicar of Masham-de-la-Poele as a tonic is advertised

to act by the vendors of a patent medicine. braced his nerves, banished his lassitude, filled him with an inclination to be up and doing, such as he had not experienced for the last six He superintended the preparation of months. the best bed-room. He harangued the housekeeper; he had several weighty consultations with the cook on the subject of the only orthodox way of making a curry; from the kitchen he descended to the wine-cellar to look out a matured and utterly. dry champagne, and from the wine cellar he repaired to the stable to consider with his coachman on the best mount for a bilious son-in-law. Then he came back to the dining-room well pleased with what he had done in the way of preparation for the Telfords, and found Mrs. Aguire waiting to receive him. She looked pale, agitated, and depressed, and kissed him hurriedly.

Mr. Vansittart, who supposed his second daughter to be at the moment in North Wales, could not conceal his astonishment. "God bless my soul!" he cried in his narve way. "Why, Susan, is that you?"

"Yes, papa, it is me," answered Mrs. Aguire with extreme chilliness; "but you need not express yourself so broadly."

Mr. Vansittart was too full of an alarm which had suggested itself to him at the sight of his daughter's strained and anxious face to catch the dire significance of the last part of her answer.

"Susan," he asked in a trembling voice, "there is nothing wrong, is there? Nothing has happened to Ambrose?"

Like all really timid and weak people who have made up their minds to be insistive, Mrs. Aguire felt that her only chance of success lay in a righteous violence. She had convinced herself that her father's conduct of his office was stained by grave faults, and she had screwed up her courage to tell him so. But though she had made up her mind to reprove irreverence boldly, and

to endure its fiery indignation, she felt no call or capacity for mediation. Mr. Vansittart's show of tender anxiety made her sensible of this. Her resolution faltered. She saw plainly enough that the only successful end to the conference which she could reach would be rupture, and she set her face to this end unflinchingly. Mr. Vansittart had given her the opening that her feeble fury needed. She seized upon it without the loss of a moment. She fixed her pale eyes as firmly as she could upon her father, and answered with great violence of manner, but in uncertain tones still:

"Ambrose is well, papa. But yet there is something the matter."

Mr. Vansittart was all satisfaction at the first half of this speech, and all anxiety again at the second.

"What is the matter, my dearest child?" he cried. "I beg of you to tell me, and this instant."

Mrs. Aguire breathed a secret prayer for help.

Some strange petitions will be found recorded in the Book of Life! Then she burst forth with a prepared impetuosity:

"Papa, you have made me miserable. I cannot keep it from you any longer. I have tried, but I cannot; and it is not right—it is wicked that I should. Papa, the way in which you conduct the services of the church here is dreadful; it is sinful, it is irreverent, it is *impious!* and it is the talk and the scandal of the whole country-side."

These disjointed words, spoken tremblingly, hurriedly, in low tones, fell upon the father's ears with all the dreadful significance of the Last Trump. He turned pale as death, staggered against the chimney-piece as if he had received a physical blow, and remained staring at the accuser with wild, unspeculative eyes.

Mrs. Aguire was appalled herself at the effect of her speech. She feared that her father was going to have a fit. She attempted to mitigate the severity of her plea. "Dear papa," she said, advancing to Mr. Vansittart, who still leant against the mantel-piece, incapable of speech or motion, "remember I only say what I have said for your good. You may think that all this has occurred to me suddenly; but, indeed, it is not so! Indeed, it is not so! I have long seen the impropriety, the irreverence; but till now I have been afraid to speak."

"Afraid, or ashamed?" said Mr. Vansittart, in such tones as his daughter had never heard before. Then he advanced upon her suddenly, with clenched hands, and lips quivering which seemed to refuse their office; they uttered nothing but unintelligible sounds. The old man's eyes, however, were eloquent, and Mrs. Aguire read that in them which chilled her. She thought that her father had gone mad; and when he had rushed fiercely from the room, the instinct of self-preservation asserted itself, and she locked the door behind him. Then she stationed herself at the window and awaited fearfully the issue of events. In two or three minutes

she heard the clatter of a horse's hoofs, and a moment afterwards she saw Mr. Vansittart, with all the appearances of desperation about him, ride furiously by the windows and take the track that led over the moor to Startleigh.

The fears which Mrs. Aguire had lately felt for herself were now transferred to the account of her husband. Even selfishness has its moments of heroism, and we will dare that for others which we have shrunk aghast from for ourselves. Mrs. Aguire rang the bell, ordered her pony-cart, and drove fiercely over rutty common tracks to the assistance of her lord.

Meanwhile, Mr. Vansittart made for Startleigh at the utmost speed to which he could urge his favourite hunter. A myriad boiling and confused thoughts at first possessed him, but the air and the exercise soon reduced these to some form, and presently they gave him further the power of expressing them, of which he had been temporarily deprived. "Aguire has done this, Aguire has done this!" he cried, over and

over again. With each utterance of his perception of the treason, he goaded his flying horse to fresh exertions. The five miles between Masham-de-la-Poele and Startleigh were covered at breakneck speed, and Mr. Vansittart seemed hardly to have made up his mind as to who was the disturber of his peace when he reined up his foaming horse in the violator's presence.

Mr. Aguire, who had a taste for gardening, was training a rose-tree against the south side of his rectory, which was backed by the moor, wondering at the same time how his brave and dutiful wife was succeeding in her painful mission, when the wild galloping of a horse fell upon his ears; he had barely time to descend from the ladder on which he was perched, and free his white hands from his gardening gauntlets, when his victim rode furiously up to the front door. Mr. Vansittart sprang from his horse, threw the reins to a servant who hurried staring at his sudden advent, and then walked fiercely to Mr. Aguire, who came as courteously

forward to meet him. The Rector of Startleigh's practised perception saw by his visitor's gait that the mine had been fired, but he welcomed Mr. Vansittart, nevertheless, with the confused urbanity naturally provoked by an unlooked for, but welcome call.

"This is an unexpected honour, Mr. Vansittart," he began, holding out his hand, which was, however, not accepted; at this he seemed for a moment a trifle surprised, then he went on: "It is a courtesy, however, mutually performed, for you and Susan must have"—— Here he stopped, it was impossible for him any longer to overlook the livid expression of fury in which his visitor's face was set.

"Good gracious, Mr. Vansittart," he exclaimed, "are you unwell? Pray let me send for a glass of sherry."

"Stay where you are," said Mr. Vansittart hoarsely. "No," he went on, as the other bowed with a courteous surprise and made as if he would open the front door. "No, I will not come under your roof till I have had some conversation with

you! We will walk here under God's own canopy! here in the garden, till I have said what I have to say; till I have asked you a question; till I have had your answer to it."

As he spoke, he led the way to a terrace which flanked one wing of the house, and commanded a wide-reaching view of russet moorland and far-off gleaming sea. Arrived here, he turned and confronted Mr. Aguire, who had followed him somewhat meditatively. The two gentlemen faced each other with the fixed determination of two duellists about to engage \hat{a} contrance. But one was flustered and could control himself only with the utmost difficulty; the other was cool, quiet, and alert.

"This," began Mr. Aguire, casting a proprietor's gratified glance around, "is a retired spot, and it has the further advantage of commanding a delicious prospect. Look at that glint of silver on the sea! You wished to speak to me, Mr. Vansittart."

[&]quot;Yes. You sent Susan to me."

[&]quot;You have seen her?"

"I have. Was it your message that she delivered?"

Mr. Aguire seemed for a moment courteously undecided. "My message?" at length he said. "Well, that depends! I might answer your question, Mr. Vansittart, by saying 'yes' and 'no.'"

"You will answer it, sir," said Mr. Vansittart, glancing at his adversary sternly, "by replying to my direct interrogatory with as little circumlocution as you can. This is a plain issue, though it is a very serious one. I ask you, as one gentleman to another, did you commission my girl Susan with the disgraceful message which she gave me within this quarter of an hour?"

"To that question I may reply in all honour 'no,' said Mr. Aguire, in a slightly aggrieved tone, "for I know myself to be as incapable of sending a disgraceful message to a fellow-worker, my senior in years, my benefactor, my friend, as my wife and your daughter would be of bearing it."

"You are chopping words with me, Mr. Aguire."

"Pardon me, Mr. Vansittart, I am reminding you that I am a gentleman."

"Sir," exclaimed the Rector of Masham-de-la-Poele, with a burst of indignation, "this is simply begging the question. My daughter has come to me this afternoon, and has said things which I could never have believed daughter would have said to father. She has made my heart bleed. She has accused me—she who, till she married you, was gentle, tender, considerate, all that a daughter should be—she has accused me—me—of irreverence in the conduct of my church! and I accuse you—you, sir—of having set her on!"

This charge was delivered with the utmost violence of manner, and with a passion that rose finally to fury, and was accompanied by a glance destined to read the other's soul. Mr. Aguire met this with a face as unruffled and serene as that of a Russian diplomatist about to efface away a frontier.

"My dear Mr. Vansittart," he said, "I shall not lower either myself or you by taking notice of a heat

which I am convinced has been begotten by a misunderstanding. I shall simply state facts, and join issue with you on your interpretation of them. That is where you err, believe me—in your interpretation. The passions, the feelings of the moment, so show us that we are but men! so cloud the clearer judgment! I do not deny that I commissioned my wife, on our sudden return from Wales, with a message to you. I do not deny that."

"Informing me that my conduct of Divine Service was irreverent?"

- "Far from it! Suggesting simply that it might be out of date."
- "Declaring that my robing in the lectern was an impropriety?"
- "No, again. Wondering why you did not put the vestry to its intended use."
- "In fact, exercising an impertinent curiosity in my affairs."
- "Say rather taking a natural interest in my father-in-law's."

"And you think that—and you think that—"
foamed Mr. Vansittart, smarting under this pitiless fire of retort—"and you think that it is a
becoming thing for a minister of God's Gospel to
set the daughter against the father on a simple
matter of form; to make her believe that what
has seemed good in her father's eyes under heaven
for forty years, and in the eyes of her dear dead
mother also, is an impropriety—an irreverence—
a sacrilege? You call this infamous conspiracy
duty! and you confess your complicity in it and
are not ashamed?"

"No," said Mr. Aguire, with a quiet smile, "for I cannot, however willing to conciliate you, confess my-self guilty of crimes which I have never committed."

"Crimes!" cried the other, who was now losing all command over himself. "Crimes! I do not know what you call crimes; but I know none darker myself, none winged more directly from the pit of Hell, than the infamy of setting the children against the father!"

As he said this, the speaker's voice rose like a trumpet, loud, menacing, and clear.

Mr. Aguire, confident as he was in the justice of his cause, would in a calmer moment have read danger in it, as well as in the clenched hands, the compressed and whitened lips, and other signals of a patience utterly expended with which it was accompanied. At the moment, however, the Rector of Startleigh's caution was deadened by the rapture of strife. He could not refrain from hazarding a final thrust at what he considered a vanquished foe. He turned with a smile of scarcely concealed contempt to the distressed father, and said compassionately:

"My dear Mr. Vansittart, it is impossible that good can come of any further continuance of this conversation. Your view of the issue is too discoloured. You speak in metaphor."

The tone almost more than the words themselves stung Mr. Vansittart—long reeling under a sense of unheard-of wrongs—to the very quick. A blind

fury possessed him. He lost all sense of position, calling, duty, in the paroxysm of one wild moment.

He seized Mr. Aguire suddenly by the collar with a grasp of unexampled fierceness and strength. "Hypocrite!" he hissed and raised his hand to strike him. The impulse was like a flash of lightning. The revulsion was as sudden; and as it seized Mr. Vansittart, and the raised hand fell limply to his side, a woman's scream rang shrilly through the stilled air. The Vicar of Masham-de-la-Poele raised his head shamefaced, utterly humiliated, and he saw that the first act in a blameless life that he had reason to be ashamed of had been witnessed by his daughter.

Mrs. Aguire, pale, panting, and in the utmost physical distress, stood between the disputants. She had rushed from the carriage at the sound of the raised voices, and running always gave her palpitations; for the moment she was unable to speak, but she eyed her father venomously. Apart from the insult she had seen him offer to her husband, deep in her mind rankled the feeling that her mission had been

a failure; that her precipitancy had occasioned the crisis. The iron had entered into her soul, and she felt little disposed to be either tolerant or filial.

"What is the meaning of this infamous scene?" at last she panted.

There was silence for a second. Then Mr. Vansittart, in whom rage had given place to debility, raised his head, and looked pathetically at his opponent.

"Aguire," he said feebly, "believe me, I am sorrier than I can say." And he held out his hand.

Mr. Aguire was all complacency at once.

"My dear Mr. Vansittart," he said, "do not mention it—I condone most gladly all that is past;" and offered to take the proffered hand.

"But I do not," cried Mrs. Aguire impetuously, "and it is not possible that I should. Papa," she went on, not heeding a moderating gesture from her husband, "papa, till you can control your quite impossible temper, and take advice which is only offered you for your good in a Christian spirit, no advantage can

come of our having any communication with each other."

All Mr. Vansittart's debility vanished at this strange speech. He did not answer his daughter in words, but he gave her a look which she remembered to her dying day, and loosened his cravat with trembling fingers. Then he turned to Mr. Aguire.

"Aguire," he said hoarsely, "you hear what that—what that—what your wife says! Am I to understand that you sympathise with her?"

Mr. Aguire looked like an embarrassed martyr.

"Dear me!" he said. "This is — is very premature, and arises altogether from a misinterpretation of motives. Such scenes as this are scandalous —are purely the result of precipitancy! Susan, my love, you must bear with your father. You—"

But no torch applied to gunpowder ever produced a more sudden explosion.

"Bear with her father!" cried Mr. Vansittart.

"Bear with her father! Is there then no such thing existent on earth, or to be expected, as filial love.

honour, and obedience? Has the world turned unnatural, or have I turned dotard?" Here a ghastly apprehension showed itself on his face. "My horse!" he cried suddenly. "My horse! I will go, or they will drive me mad between them. My God, they will drive me mad!"

Filled apparently with this fear, he made for his horse, which was being led up and down on the gravel in the front of the house.

As soon as he was out of hearing, Mr. Aguire said to his wife: "You have been too precipitate, Susan."

"Precipitate!" said Mrs. Aguire, who felt that she alone was the aggrieved party. "Precipitate! I have only said what I felt was my duty. But papa's violent temper is more than any one can stand."

Mr. Aguire, who was not altogether satisfied with this explanation, hurried after Mr. Vansittart, who, half paralysed with rage and doubt, was making vain attempts to mount his horse without assistance.

"Stand off, sir!" he cried, seeing his son-in-law approach. Then he made a last effort, and climbed into the saddle.

"Mr. Vansittart," said Mr. Aguire, motioning for the groom to withdraw himself, "let me entreat you not to leave my house in this spirit. Do not let the sun go down on the wrath which arises from a misconception. At least stay to rest and refresh yourself, if you will do me no other favour."

Mr. Vansittart, whose brain seemed to be on fire, was touched with the consideration shown in this appeal. He bent down from the saddle.

"Aguire," he said, "God bless you for that. I believe I have misjudged you. By-and-by, when I am cooler, we will talk over this matter; but not now—not when she is near. The very sight of her kills me."

He put spurs to his horse and rode away fiercely, as he had come.

Mr. Aguire went back to his wife.

"This is altogether scandalous, Susan," he began,

"I am afraid that you have misconducted your mission; that you have not treated your father with the respect due to his years and his relationship."

Mrs. Aguire upon this burst into floods of tears.

"This is too cruel!" she sobbed. "I have done exactly as you told me to. I warned you what would be the results. I told you how intemperate papa was, and that he would fly into a fury; and now that my words have come true, I am to be blamed in the matter! This is too cruel!"

Mr. Aguire was deeply in love with his wife—indeed he had been married little over three weeks—so that he found this sight of beauty in tears a trying one.

"My child," he said, "I have no wish to blame you if you have only done your duty. I am afraid—that is, my only fear is—that your zeal may have led you to exceed it. Think, my dearest," he said after a pause, "apart from the subject of your conversation—which, of course, could not have been agreeable to him—was there nothing in your

manner or expression which may account for this strange outburst?"

"Nothing," said Mrs. Aguire stoutly. "Papa is possessed, and always has been since I have known him, of a confirmed obstinacy and a most violent temper, and he has now the weakness of old age added, to strengthen both."

"In that case," said Mr. Aguire, "we have nothing to reproach ourselves with."

Mr. Vansittart meanwhile made his way home across the wild moorlands, with the hysterica passio tearing at his heart. He could neither eat nor sleep, and being too old to withstand the combined attacks of abstinence and ingratitude, presently was seized with a nervous fever. In two days he had begun to look so ghastly that the housekeeper took the responsibility of the case into her own hands, and sent for the doctor. Mr. Vansittart received his visitor with a courteous indifference, much to the housekeeper's surprise, and said that he was sorry that he had been sent for. "There is nothing the

matter," he said. The doctor asked a few questions, to which he got unsatisfactory answers. He was desired not to give himself the trouble of calling again: before he went, however, he drew the house-keeper aside, and asked her whether her master had recently been subjected to any sudden shock. "He has had no bad news?"

- "Not as I am aware of, sir."
- "No money losses?"
- "Not as I am aware of, sir."
- "Nothing unexpected has happened?"
- "His daughter and her husband are on their way here from India, sir, if that is to be considered unexpected."
- "They are going to stay with him for some while, I suppose?"
 - "Yes, sir."
- "That is a fortunate thing. He may any day need their care. Meanwhile," he added, drawing on his gloves, "don't thwart him in anything. Let him have plenty of nourishing food, and above all no

worry." Then he went home and told his assistant that he had seen another of those sudden breaks-up of athletic old men.

Mr. Vansittart for a week or more did not stir out of his garden. He moped about his house and grounds, silent, apathetic, utterly dejected. He seemed to have lost all hold upon life, and one morning his housekeeper caught him sitting in the summer-house in a flood of tears. With the foresight of her sex she now proclaimed the heavy news that master would not be long with them, and upon this tears flowed freely in the servants' hall. The village was in consternation.

When things seemed at their worst, a telegram was put one morning into Mr. Vansittart's hand, which acted upon his depressed vital forces like the elixir of life. He had, in his disposition of mind and body, lost count altogether of Mrs. Telford's promised approach. The message he now received came from her, and announced that, after having experienced the most terrific weather at sea, she and

her husband would be at Masham-de-la-Poele station at four o'clock that afternoon, D.V.

This news seemed in one instant to restore the Vicar of Masham-de-la-Poele to life, strength, and spirits, and he announced his resuscitation in words which made his housekeeper stare.

"Thank God," he said, "I have still a daughter!"

"A daughter, sir! I should hope you have two; though why Miss Susan has never come over to see you since you have been poorly—well, is more than I can say."

Mr. Vansittart eyed his housekeeper with a sudden suspicion.

"How should Miss Susan know that I have been poorly?" he asked sternly. "You have not told her, woman, have you?"

"Lord love you, no, sir," gasped the housekeeper, frightened at the violence of her master's manner. Then she added a rider apart: "Lord forgive me for saying so!"

Mr. Vansittart eyed his old servant sternly, as if

he had half read her confession. Then he said: "Go to your occupations in the still-room," and dismissed her filled with her first suspicion that there was a skeleton in the Vansittart household.

At four o'clock that afternoon, Mr. Vansittart drove up to the station at Masham-de-la-Poele in his double dog-cart. He looked pale and thin, but high spirits had given him a fictitious strength, and he held the reins himself during the five-mile journey. This exercise of one of his favourite pastimes made him feel like himself once more, and he soon found further nepenthe from his griefs in the arms of his eldest daughter. But misfortune makes people sanguine—often fatally so—and Mrs. Telford, in whom the Vicar of Masham reposed his last hope of earthly happiness, had changed since he had last set eyes upon her. She had been then a romantic, buoyant girl, with unsettled fancies; she was now a practical woman, whose ideal in life was living in a High Church, and saving three-quarters of her husband's income. She

did this out of no spite, still less from any selfish promptings, but purely from motives of prudential consideration. In outward appearance she was her sister's exact opposite. She was dark, brownskinned, wiry, and as active as a cricket. She had black, beady eyes with a very frank expression in them, a rapid and decisive way of talking, and prominent teeth. Economy was the chill goddess of her devotions, she worshipped with almost a blind rage at the shrine, and upon the altar of Thrift she daily offered up her husband, a dyspeptic and unwilling sacrifice.

Mr. Telford, a thin, languid, yellow-faced man, with a heavy moustache and dull gray eyes, had, after years of assiduous labour under a tropical sun, acquired a comfortable fortune and a chronic liver complaint; but having once allowed his authority in money affairs to sink into abeyance, he soon found that neither of these acquisitions was of any service to him.

Whenever he proposed a day's outing to ease

a bodily ill, the chancellor of his exchequer looked at him sadly and asked him what advantage he saw in extravagance. Had he not a good cook and every comfort at home? When he replied, Undoubtedly, but that he also had an indigestion, and that change was good for it, he was advised to try Frederikshall waters instead of Carlsbad salts. This made him pensive; and when his friends envied him the possession of a model wife his natural thoughtfulness became increased.

"Yes," he would reply pathetically, "Agatha is a good manager."

Reinforced by these allies Mr. Vansittart hoped to make his position good against the unutterable coalition at Startleigh. Cheered by this belief, during the first part of the fine drive home, he showed himself in the best of his accustomed spirits. He complimented his daughter Agatha on her good looks, assured her with tears standing in his keen eyes, that she had come in time to comfort his declining years, and was prodigal in inquiries after

his son-in-law's liver. All went merrily as a marriagebell; Mrs. Telford sat beside her father and admired his horses, and her husband sat behind wrapped in four rugs, smoking Trichinopoli cheroots.

The tender pressure of his daughter's hand on his arm, as she now and again pointed out well-remembered features of the landscape, thrilled Mr. Vansittart with a great joy. He felt all the father in him expand once more; a sort of sacred rapture possessed him, his eyes gleamed with a strange, wistful tenderness and a smile of ecstasy gradually fixed itself upon his lips. It seemed as if after a week of total darkness some great light had fallen upon him from the skies, as if the very heaven of happiness had been opened, and he had been invited to enter in.

But all this while dark Care sat perched behind the charioteer.

At the third mile-stone from Masham-de-la-Poele, Mrs. Telford, who had up to now confined her attention admiring the scenery and whispering fond things to her father, said:

"By-the-way, how is Susan?"

No dagger-thrust could have had a more instant effect. Mr. Vansittart dropped the reins, and turned pale as death.

"Susan?" he said mechanically.

"Susan? Yes, Susan! Good gracious, papa, where are you driving to?"

Here they were nearly overset. Mrs. Telford grasped the reins in time to prevent a catastrophe. This done, she turned in surprise, not unmixed with indignation, to her father, when both these feelings gave place to concern.

"Why, you are ill, papa!" she cried.

"Charles," said Mr. Vansittart, in the weak voice of a man recovering from a fit, and appealing to the groom who was sitting behind with Mr. Telford. "Charles," he said, "take the reins."

The man did as he was bid.

"Why, what on earth is the meaning of this, papa?" cried Mrs. Telford, as her father climbed into the back seat. "I wish you would say

whether you are ill or no. This suspense is unbearable."

"I am well, my dear," said Mr. Vansittart, with a well-feigned attempt at calmness, "but I am tired." Then he leant over and whispered into his daughter's ear: "Never mention that person's name." He accompanied these words with a look of such indescribable horror that Mrs. Telford was aghast. Mr. Telford looked at his father-in-law keenly. He had heard the whisper, and he made his wife a sign to say no more. The rest of the drive was performed in a ghastly silence. Mr. Vansittart sat plunged in a gloomy abstraction; he seemed to be summoning up recollections which did not answer to his call, and every now and then he smiled inanely.

The stoppage of the carriage at his own front door, however, restored him to a sense of his surroundings, and at the same time it seemed to dispel the fancies that had clouded his brain during the latter part of the drive. He alighted with alacrity, and welcomed his daughter home with grace.

"You know your way about, Archibald," he said, speaking to her husband. "Dinner will be in half-an-hour." Then he went to his room to dress.

In a fever of suspense, Mrs. Telford sent for the housekeeper, and questioned her on the strange incidents of the drive. The woman made good use of an opportunity for which she had long been dying, and was prodigal in suspicions, fancies, and fears. Mrs. Telford now heard for the first time of her sister's marriage to Mr. Aguire. She had known him long by reputation as an ardent propagandist of his peculiar views. Her quick intelligence caught the drift of the situation. She dismissed the housekeeper and sent for her husband. She told him what she had heard, and then favoured him with her deductions.

- "It is only a religious difference," she said.
- "Only!" exclaimed Mr. Telford. "I should say, then, that it was a serious one enough."
- "Spare me your flippancy," answered his wife.
 "Don't mention Susan this evening. I have come

in time to heal a division. To-morrow by this time all will be well."

But Mr. Telford, perhaps from the pains of experience, seemed to have no lively faith in his wife's powers to heal. He expressed his doubts laconically.

"You had better mind what you are about, Aggy," he said, "if you will take my advice; or you will be driving the old gentleman off his head."

"Kindly allow me to judge what is best for my own father," replied Mrs. Telford hotly, "and," she added, "mind what you drink for dinner."

The daughter and son-in-law now went downstairs and found the master of the house in the drawing-room. He was dressed with scrupulous care, and soon showed himself restored to his usual cheerful frame of mind. During an excellent dinner he admirably played the part of host, and when his daughter had retired to the drawingroom with a warning glance at her husband, he produced a classic port, and said that he had not passed so happy an evening since he had last seen her.

"Dear Agatha," he said, "she was always good and kind to me."

This was the first allusion he had made to his. trouble since the drive, and Mr. Telford, looking up, saw that tears stood in the speaker's eyes. Being a tender-hearted man himself, the Indian civil servant found it necessary to explore the bottom of his glass to avoid a worse weakness, and he drank much of a wine which, however matured, was death to him. He entered the drawing-room half-an-hour afterwards a pale, dejected, misan-But his father-in-law throughout the rest of the evening maintained an even flow of spirits. He was perfectly, almost childishly, happy, and in many ways, with his daughter's assistance, he revived the memories of the past. He made Mrs. Telford sing all her old songs, and he joined with her himself in a hunting duet. He played

a game of cribbage with her, and told her that she was the dearest daughter that man ever had. Finally, he fell asleep in the act of describing the last run with the beagles, and Mrs. Telford rang the bell and said there would be no prayers.

A quarter of an hour, afterwards she went upstairs to her bed-room, and caught her husband in the act of taking two Cockle's pills.

"You look rather pale, Archibald," she said.

Mr. Telford hastened to say that he had never felt better in his life, and passed the second pill up his shirt-sleeve.

"Very well, then," said Mrs. Telford, with all the decision of a general mapping out a campaign, "to-morrow you will go hunting with papa immediately after breakfast."

"God forbid!" said Mr. Telford.

"Archibald," said his wife, "I will trouble you to bridle your impiety in my presence. As to riding you know that it is good for you. Nothing," she went on after a pause, "can have gone better than my plans so far. I have laid the foundation to-night; to-morrow I am going to complete the reconciliation, and it is absolutely necessary for the success of my scheme that you and papa should go out hunting."

Mrs. Telford was possessed of an immense pertinacity, and her husband had long savoured this fact. A further proof of it was in store for him. He rose next morning supereminently bilious, but notwithstanding found himself mounted on a fidgety hunter at half-past nine. Mr. Vansittart had fallen an easy victim to his daughter's ruse to get him out of the house for half a day. It was a splendid hunting morning, and the beagles soon started a staunch hare. During an hour and forty minutes' run Mr. Telford suffered all the torments of the damned; and his father-in-law's pack had no sooner broken up one hare than they started a fresh one. Mr. Vansittart was in an ecstasy.

His joy, however, was destined to be short-lived. Mrs. Telford had no sooner satisfied herself that the hunting party were well out of the parish than sheordered the carriage for herself, and drove over to Startleigh. She found her sister and husband at home, and received the heartiest of welcomes. She also was furnished with a complete history of the nature of Mr. Vansittart's split with the family, from the family's point of view.

"Papa is mad, and that is the whole truth of the matter," said Mrs. Aguire.

"Susan, are you certain?" cried Mrs. Telford, unwilling to be convinced, yet remembering the carriage incident of the day before at the same moment.

"Certain, my dear! I am as certain of it as I am standing here. It is, of course, very, very sad; but something should really be done. Papa is quite unfit for performing his duties; and the whole affair is a scandal to the Church."

"That, of course, is the only way in which I look at it," said Mr. Aguire.

"Of course," said Mrs. Telford, beaming upon him.

"Even looking at the matter from the stand-

point of duty," Mr. Aguire went on, duly impressed with the sympathy and encouragement shown him by his sister-in-law, "I should feel, I assure you (and, as Susan will tell you, I have felt) the greatest possible disinclination to move in the matter. The experience of life has taught me tolerance; and a certain respect, in my opinion, should be shown even to the foibles of age. I leave the question of my dear relationship to Mr. Vansittart, and my sympathy for him as a man, out of the question. I should, therefore, as I was saying," he concluded, "feel averse to move in the matter, were I not informed on the best authority that steps are meditated-if they are not at this moment being taken by those in authority—to force upon Mr. Vansittart's attention the -- ahem !-- the necessity for reform."

This was a speech in Mr. Aguire's Metternich manner. It was full of pauses, was delivered with a slow gravity, and hinted at something darkly.

Mrs. Telford had been unable to follow its sinuous windings, but she had understood enough

to perceive that the danger suggested in it was

"This is very dreadful," she said with a quick: gasp. Then she asked from what quarter the danger might be expected.

Mr. Aguire told her that a new bishop had been appointed to the diocese, and that he held the strictest views. He did not, however, add that the new comer was an intimate friend.

"A scandal of the kind you hint at," cried Mrs. Telford, "must be avoided at all hazards. Papa must be persuaded. It will pain him no doubt, but it will be for his good in the end. It is better in any event that a fancied injury should come from his own family than a perfect stranger, and his bishop."

"Undoubtedly!" said Mrs. Aguire, "that is what I have from the first seen."

"I wish sincerely it could be managed," sighed Mr. Aguire.

Mrs. Telford now unfolded her original plan. "It can be managed, I think, very easily," she said;

"that is to say if you and Susan will be guided by me. The best thing to do will be for you to drive back with me to luncheon. Just at this moment I have a strong influence over papa. My presence will shield you from any unpleasantness, and in the subsequent discussion of affairs you can add the weight of your persuasion to mine."

Mr. Aguire at once said that he thought this plan an excellent one.

"It will influence your father if anything will," he said, "and will be at the same moment a proof to him that I look upon him with the sincerest feelings of personal liking, and am uninfluenced in the attitude I have been compelled to take up by any hostile feeling whatsoever."

Half-an-hour afterwards Mr. and Mrs. Aguire and Mrs. Telford were on their way to Masham-de-la-Poele. At the very moment that the three Fates were advancing to the wreck of his happiness, their victim was pouring his woes into the ears of his son-in-law. On the way home after a magnificen

morning's sport, a sudden impulse had urged the old man to speak, and he found a surprised and sympathetic listener.

As they approached the Vicarage of Masham from the Moorland side, Mr. Vansittart had brought his heavy recital to a close. "You see," he said, "Archibald I am an old man now. It is the evening of my life, and I wish to end my life as I have lived it. The past—the happy past, shared by her who has gone before me," here he uncovered, "is all that is left to me in this world; and, as she saw no harm in it, why, I cannot believe that it will keep me from joining her in the world to come. To go back now would be to confess that my life has been unworthy! Cannot you see that, my boy?"

"Of course I can see it," answered Mr. Telford hotly, "and I think that you have been and are being subjected to an infamous persecution, and to nothing more or less—and it is a damned shame!—I beg your ten thousand pardons! As for Mr. and Mrs. Aguire," he said, raising his voice, "I do not trust myself to

say what I think of their conduct; but one thing I do know, and that is, if I were in your place I would never set eyes upon them again."

Here he turned the corner into the Rectory courtyard and met the party from Startleigh face to face. Both he and Mr. Vansittart reined up their horses as violently as if they had been confronted by some supernatural apparition. But the three forms before them were substantial enough. They had arrived some moments before and were grouped to receive their victim.

There was a pause, during which both parties eyed each other in silence. Then a violent trembling took possession of Mr. Vansittart. He turned his horse, and prepared to ride away.

Mr. Telford laid his hand, however, upon the rein, and said:

"Don't let them think you are afraid of them."

At the same moment Mrs. Telford advanced and opened the parley.

"Papa," she said, "dearest papa! I have heard from Susan of your difference. She is most unhappy that it should have occurred. She is miserable; and she has asked me to bring about a reconciliation. I have taken it upon me to ask her and her husband to luncheon"—(pause)—"I feel sure that you will receive them."

Mr. Vansittart fell a victim to this adroit address. It was indeed a masterpiece; for it appealed to every weak part in the Rector's nature in a moment—to his pride, to his warmth of heart, to his sacred sense of the duties of hospitality. It expressed sorrow, it suggested submission, and it was delivered with an insinuating hesitancy that was most telling. It proved instantly fatal. Mr. Vansittart flung himself from his horse and folded the peacemaker in his arms.

"My darling," he cried, "you have brought me to life once more." Then after a pause, instinct with the utmost high breeding, he stepped up to Mr. Aguire and shook him by the hand; then he turned

to Susan and fairly wept over her. "You are dearer to me than all, my treasure," he sobbed, "because for a moment I had lost you."

The three intending reformers of Mr. Vansittart's habits of life were something disconcerted by the warmth of this reception. It was comforting for the moment, but their minds wandered to the painful return that they were presently going to make to it. They thought of the dire duty of the afternoon. The imminence of the future depressed them-and through luncheon they were chilling, though they tried their best to be gay. For his part Mr. Vansittart was like a lamb that is to be led to the slaughter. He was full of loud thanksgivings that all clouds had passed, confident in the uninterrupted happiness of the future. In the face of this naive joy the Startleigh confederacy were troubled—their project seemed so like a murder of an innocent—and each one of them found it necessary to assist a warling sense of duty with a due measure of champagne.

Towards, the end of luncheon Mr. Telford, who

had sat through the meal pale, silent, but with a fateful look upon his face, put his hand to his side, and left the room suddenly. Almost immediately afterwards Mr. Vansittart, who had up till now been in the highest possible state of spirits, looked at Mrs. Aguire in a kind of prolonged ecstasy, and burst into senile tears.

The three confederates interchanged a glance. The moment for action was come. Mrs. Telford and her sister rose from their seats.

"Gentlemen," said Mrs. Telford, "you will find us in the summer-house when you want us." Then she and Mrs. Aguire left the room.

Alone in the face of a painful duty, Mr. Aguire leaned back in his chair, sighed, and closed his eyes for a minute or two. Mr. Vansittart, who had now regained command over himself, pushed the claret to his son-in-law, who declined it with a faint smile.

"You don't look well, Aguire," said the host.

The Rector of Startleigh upon this joined issue.

"I have no doubt that I do not, Mr. Vansittart,"

he began in rather a husky voice, "for I am a highly sensitive man, and I find myself with a very painful duty to perform. Have I your attention for ten minutes?"

"Certainly—by all means," said Mr. Vansittart, expecting to hear about a case for parish relief. To such lengths was he unsuspicious. "Shall we go into the library?" he added, rising.

Mr. Aguire looked at him steadily.

"By no means," he said. "No change of room can, unfortunately, mitigate the unpleasantness, the extreme—ahem!—unpleasantness of my duty."

Mr. Vansittart stared.

"Is it something—" he said—"have you something to tell me in connection with the parish?"

"Yes and no. Rather with your administration of it."

The hues of apoplexy showed themselves on Mr. Vansittart's face. At last he perceived the fatal drift of the conversation. He mastered himself with an effort.

"I think we have already discussed that subject," he said.

"And yet I fear it still calls for discussion."

"I do not understand you; I decline to understand you. We will join the ladies," cried Mr. Vansittart, rising from his chair.

Mr. 'Aguire made a step forward and detained him.

"Mr. Vansittart," he said, "credit me, I beseech, with all friendly motives; do not misinterpret my aims, but believe me when I tell you candidly, straightforwardly, as a son-in-law, as a fellow-worker in Christ, that unless reforms are instituted in your manner of conducting your service grave and imminent scandals will ensue."

The words were hardly out of the speaker's mouth than Mr. Vansittart turned upon him like a hunted beast at bay.

"Eeave my house," he said fiercely. Then, with a revulsion of feeling, "I am an old man, Mr. Aguire. I have forgotten myself once in your company. I have no wish to do so again. But, leave my house. You have misconducted yourself. I will join my daughters."

Mr. Aguire was now white with anger himself. Nevertheless, he could not prevent a smile of pity from appearing on his lips at this piteous exhibition of fatherly faith.

"I am afraid you will meet with small support from your daughters, Mr. Vansittart," he said.

'We will see, sir," said Mr. Vansittart. "Yes, you shall see too. Pardon me," he continued, "but you shall." Then, as the other drew back protesting, Mr. Vansittart grasped his hand, and half led him half dragged him on to the lawn.

Mr. Aguire's high moral courage was cowed under this physical violence. He lost all power of resistance. He was in the presence of his confederates almost before he knew it, and he stood before them a piteous sight.

The ladies rose frightened.

"Susan," said Mr. Vansittart, "I have to ask you

a question. Your husband "—here he released Mr. Aguire—"your husband—child—child—has deliberately opened up a question which is an insult, and which I understood, when I received him once more in my house, was closed for ever. I have a solemn question to ask you. Think well, child, before you answer. Did he ask it with your assent? Think before you answer," he insisted again, "for in this matter there is life and death."

Mrs. Aguire looked upon her father's emotion with a coldness that was almost loathing.

"I am at a loss to explain your extraordinary conduct, papa," she said, "and your manner makes me doubtful whether you are yourself. However, if the question which my husband has opened is connected with the reform of your parish, I have no hesitation or scruple in telling you that he had my complete and most cordial assent."

Mr. Vansittart received this answer with a stare. It seemed to deprive him temporarily of the use of speech. But, with a frenzied gesture, he made the thought that was passing through his brain clear. He pointed wildly over and over again to the front gate. At last his tongue performed its office:

"Go—go—go!" he said; "and let me never see either of you again. Hypocrites! slanderers!" Then with an awful expression of maniacal fury directed to his daughter, "Unnatural!"

Mrs. Aguire shrugged her shoulders, though she had turned very pale. She fixed her eyes on her sister. Mr. Vansittart at the same moment rushed forward and grasped Mrs. Telford's hand.

"You at least, Agatha," he cried in an agony of entreaty, "you at least will be true, will be tender, dutiful? I am your father, child—your father; and I am old—very weak—very desolate."

A spasm contracted Mrs. Telford's face, her lips quivered; she was on the point of giving way. But at this moment Mrs. Aguire, behind her father's back, signalled to her to be firm.

"I am sorry to say, papa," she said, "that in

this matter of reform, I think that Mr. Aguire and Susan are right and you are wrong. If Susan goes—I go too!"

"Then, go!" thundered Mr. Vansittart, "and let me never set eyes on you again!" He made no further attempt to speak—he made no further gesture. He stood like a statue of desolation. Mr. and. Mrs. Aguire and Mrs. Telford turned and left him.

"You will come with us to Startleigh," said. Susan to her sister. "We can walk home across the moor. To-morrow he will come round."

"I must first find Archibald," said Mrs. Telford.

"Oh dear, dear, dear!" Here she cried copiously.

She found on inquiry that Mr. Telford had hurried off to the nearest town to consult the medical man, so the three started for their moorland walk without him. They were silent as they turned away from the Vicarage, but as they reached the top of some rising ground which overlooked it, Mrs. Telford stopped and looked back. She saw her father stand-

ing fixed, motionless, in the same attitude in which they had left him.

"Merciful heavens," said Mrs. Telford, "he seems turned to stone."

"To-morrow he will be more reasonable," said Mrs. Aguire.

The three walked over to Startleigh, and Mrs. Telford sent from there a letter for her husband telling him to join her, and a trap to bring back the luggage. On his return from the doctor Mr. Telford was met at Masham Rectory gate by Mr. Vansittart's butler, who told him that his master was ill in bed, and gave him Mrs. Telford's letter. Suspecting the worst, Mr. Telford hurried over to Startleigh, yellow, but breathing vengeance, and, on inquiring as to what had occurred at Masham during his absence, was met with vague assurances and a studied reserve. saw at once that adroit advantage had been taken of his enforced absence from his father-in-law's side, and that the opportunity for a serviceable intervention was gone. Notwithstanding this he spoke his mind

freely on the moral aspect of the crisis, and spared neither his wife nor her sister in the course of a truculent appeal.

The ladies were both much shocked that conduct which duty so plainly prompted should be subject to so gross a misinterpretation, and they appealed to Mr. Aguire to give their views form. The Rector of Startleigh, however, proved but a tame ally. Now that the victory was over he seemed to grieve for the carnage; and when Mr. Telford, catching hope from his irresolution, made a last appeal to him to put a stop to what he roundly termed persecution disguised as duty, Mr. Aguire only smiled sadly, and said that the matter had now passed out of his hands.

The next morning Mr. Vansittart received a letter from the new bishop of the diocese, requesting him, in studied parase, to be more reverent with regard to ritual and to give up hunting beagles. The wreck of a fine constitution succumbed under this stroke. Mr. Vansittart was without the vital force necessary to survive such an accumulation of disaster. He

became invalid in body and mind; a partial paralysis seized him, and, after reading his bishop's letter, he never altogether recovered the use of his limbs. To his weakened senses the reprimand, however courteous, falling on the close of a life passed without a reproach, seemed an Excommunication.

On the verge of the grave, friendless, suffering, under the censure of the authorities, and with his children in revolt, Mr. Vansittart's faith in the justice of his own cause was at last shaken. No Providence, it seemed to him, could permit so dire a succession of disasters to fall upon an innocent man.

The Vicar of Masham felt that he had offended. His simple life rose before him, sterile of good works—a dire record of wasted opportunity. Even to his children he felt that he had not acted as a father. His daughters had entreated him to turn from his profitless ways, and in the insolence of his righteous self-confidence he had cursed them. The climax of abasement was soon reached. Weak

in body and mind, his fancied sin took awful proportions. He felt that no prayers of his own could save from damnation the unnatural father. Aghast, conscience-stricken, he sent for Mr. Aguire.

"I have sinned," he said; "but I am punished. Send my girls to me! I am dying!"

Mr. Aguire administered due consolation, and then went back to Startleigh rather flushed, and told the party there what he had seen.

"He needs a nurse more than a doctor," he said.

"I will go to dear papa," said Mrs. Telford.

She went, and installed herself from that day forth. Her father recognised her with a shamefaced effusion. He seemed at the last gasp. The remnants, however, of a magnificent constitution combated death, and by a curious stroke of irony Mr Vansittart revived gradually from the day on which his daughter had come to nurse him. To a certain extent his bodily vigour returned, but his intellect remained clouded. He was still convinced beyond refutation

that he had committed a lifelong sin, and his daughters, though they did not humour him in this belief, made no attempt to discourage it.

Meanwhile, Mr. Aguire engaged a curate, and did duty at Masham himself. It might be supposed that the villagers, after a lifelong experience of a far different administration under which they had abundantly prospered, did not too abruptly savour the delights of novelty; but the reverse as an issue of the proposition will not surprise those who have practically tested the constancy of the lower classes in a case in which gratitude is balanced against gain. The inhabitants of Masham in point of fact soon forgot the prosperity which they had enjoyed under Mr. Vansittart's rule, in the ardour with which they followed Mr. Aguire's wax-work processions on Saints' days. Nor was Mr. Vansittart himself in a feeble form loath to express his ardour too. In his own Church, refurbished according to Ritualism, he dumbly acquiesced in the celebration of the rites.

Seated beside his daughters in the family pew he

bowed his white head at those numerous passages in the service at which they did. Under their sure care and authority he quietly abnegated every thought, every sympathy, every wish. In a modern and degraded form he was the Lear of the Establishment.

This view of the case was, however, not shared by Mr. and Mrs. Aguire.

"Agatha is doing well for papa," said this lady to her husband one afternoon when he had ridden back from Startleigh, after the performance of three services at Masham, "Agatha is doing well for papa," she said, "and so are you, too, dear Ambrose, though you look tired."

"Yes, dear," answered Mr. Aguire, "I am tired, but I am content; for (humanly speaking) I am satisfied that, in your dear father's case, we have throughout acted for the best."

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